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Six Mrs. Greenes

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By

LORNA REA

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CLOSED STACKS

SIX MRS. GREENES

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To

PHILIP RUSSELL REA

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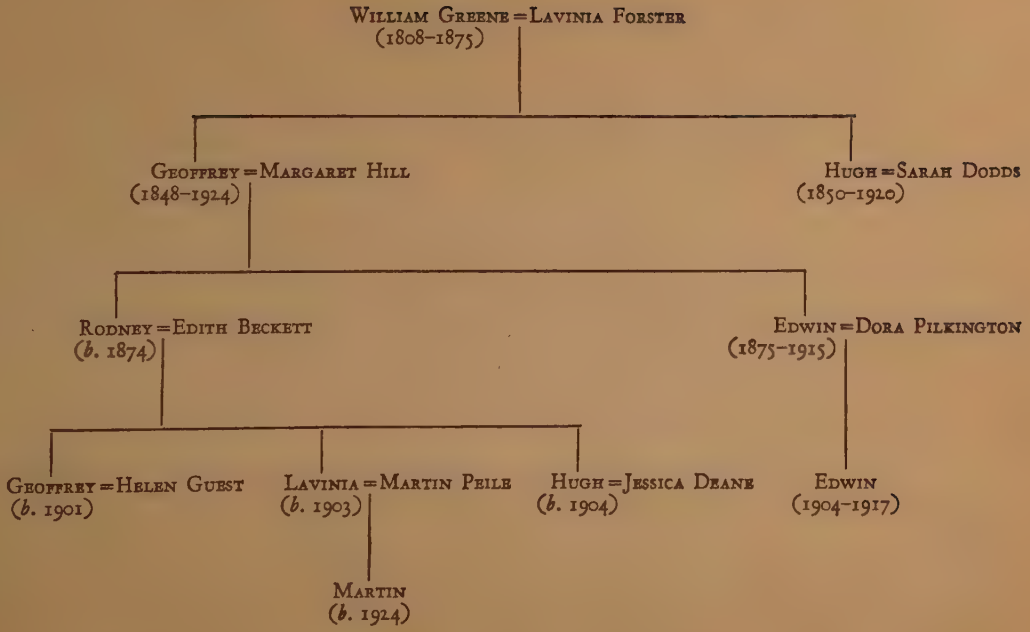
William Greene = Lavinia Forster
(1808–1875)
Geoffrey = Margaret Hill
(1848–1924)
Hugh = Sarah Dodds
(1850–1920)
Rodney = Edith Beckett
(b. 1874)
Edwin = Dora Pilkington
(1875–1915)
Geoffrey = Helen Guest
(b. 1901)
Lavinia = Martin Peile
(b. 1903)
Hugh = Jessica Deane
(b. 1904)
Edwin
(1904–1917)
Martin
(b. 1924)

Six Mrs. Greenes

CHAPTER I

Mrs. Greene

I

OLD MRS. GREENE was very tired. When she was tired she talked to herself, and her talk was a jumble of names. Her sons, her grandsons, her granddaughter, her granddaughter's husband, jigged about in her brain. They formed groups, advanced towards her in a solid phalanx, broke up and receded again. The pattern of their comings and goings was shot with pleasure at some remembered incident, or again with intense irritation that found vent in mumbled phrases. "She's always been a stupid woman."

"What did you say, Mrs. Greene?" asked Miss Dorset, a quiet, pleasant young woman who acted as her housekeeper and companion.

"I didn't," said Mrs. Greene, annoyed at being interrupted in that restless, uncontrollable reverie which was all that remained to her of thought;

but the innumerable little lines on her old cheeks smoothed into tranquillity as a sudden recollection of her granddaughter's last visit established itself momentarily in her mind. Lavinia had been very sweet and so pretty. That scarlet frock had seemed to darken her eyes and whiten her skin; even her hair shone as she sat on a footstool after dinner in front of the fire, her hands clasped round her knees, and talked about Martin, endlessly, glowingly; about the two Martins, her husband and her son. A happy child Lavinia; Martin, a satisfactory grandson-in-law, and Martin, the little great-grandson, a pleasant thing to think about. Why was it that Lavinia's husband had not been able to come for the week-end with Lavinia? Mrs. Greene groped in her mind for the reason, and then stumbled on it suddenly as one of the things Lavinia had spoken about with pride. Martin had been asked to go North to represent the firm on business. He had to interview two clients and persuade them to carry through an important deal, and it was a matter for congratulation that the negotiations had been intrusted to him.

Old Mrs. Greene pondered. The beginnings of life, how terrible they were; each action, even the most impulsive and ill-considered, marching steadily on towards its inevitable result, and elim-

inating, logically, the possibility of any other result.

For a moment, looking back, she saw her life move down its long determined track, marked erratically here and there by emotions, incidents, and circumstances; her passionate love for Geoffrey, her husband; her passionate maternal love for Rodney and Edwin; the death of her father; her sons' marriages; her husband's sudden and widespread literary recognition; Edwin's death; and then her husband's death, followed immediately by the birth of Lavinia's son, her only great grandchild. She looked down at her thin old hands with the loose rings slipping up the fingers and thought with queer lucidity what changes are wrought by the alchemy of years in this poor human stuff.

Immediately her age, her weariness, her thousand bodily discomforts, crowded into the present and engulfed the past.

"Miss Dorset," she said, querulously, "help me to bed. Miss Dorset, I'm tired."

II

When a hen's life is ended by the chopper the severed head falls to the ground, but the body,

with spattered wings awkwardly outstretched, steps erratically this way and that, watched from the ground by its own surprised eye, until its ultimate surrender to the laws of death and gravity.

Miss Dorset, fifteen years ago, had suffered and lived through a kindred mutilation, being forced to watch from the edge of a cliff her twin sister and only relative drowning, a hundred yards from the shore. Mary Dorset had gone bathing; Clara Dorset had gone walking. Mary took cramp, struggled a little, and sank, while Clara on the top of the cliff darted a few steps to right, a few to left, screaming, and finally fell to the ground, overborne by the shocking realization of her loss and of her utter impotence to have prevented it.

Since then Miss Dorset, always competent, always adequate, had been curiously incomplete. Anæsthetized by this early tragedy, she was invulnerable to further suffering, impervious to the pinpricks of poverty and dependence, and utterly unmoved in the face of any difficulty or crisis. Sometimes at night between waking and sleeping, or in the early morning between sleeping and waking, she was stabbed by a poignant vision of that scene of fifteen years ago, but no trace of

emotion showed, as a rule, in her quiet manner of life.

She had lived with Mrs. Greene for seven years, at first as housekeeper and secretary. Since Mr. Greene's death, however, which had occurred suddenly three years ago, her rôle had been much more comprehensive. She managed the household, prepared for visitors, welcoming them unobtrusively on their arrival, and discreetly beckoning one guest out as she shepherded another in, lest the fatigue of prolonged conversation should lead to a restless night for the old lady. But she was also Mrs. Greene's constant companion, on her walks, in the house, and at meals; there were indeed few moments in the day when she could contrive to be alone.

The measured routine of life was rarely broken in its succession of small daily services and arrangements, but when any of the grandchildren came for a visit Miss Dorset showed a natural grace not only in her methods of self-effacement, but in leaving undone those trivial duties which, carried out by Geoffrey, Lavinia, or Hugh, became a source of pleasure to Mrs. Greene. "Give me a cushion, Geoffrey, and arrange my shawl," she would say; and when Geoffrey had fumbled the cushion into place Miss Dorset, fully con-

scious of the fact that he had not added to Mrs. Greene's comfort, nevertheless appreciated the pleasure that it had given her to be waited on by her grandson.

There was a genuinely comfortable relationship between Mrs. Greene and Miss Dorset: Mrs. Greene seldom resented the fact of her physical dependence on Miss Dorset, and Miss Dorset understood too well to be wounded by any sharpness of tongue, the old woman's kindliness, sagacity, and clear-sightedness.

At 9.15 every morning Miss Dorset brought up the letters, and waited quietly by the bedside, watching the unsteady fingers tearing open the envelopes and slowly withdrawing the rustling sheets. It would have been easy to offer to help, but Miss Dorset was infinitely patient. "Mrs. Greene likes to do little things for herself," she would explain. "It takes a few moments longer, but she has a great deal of leisure, you know." And Helen—it was generally Helen who expostulated at delay and was ready with her facile "Let me do it, Grannie,"—must needs restrain herself and watch the number of laborious trembling movements that were necessary to perform any simple action.

This morning Miss Dorset, remembering Mrs.

Greene's extreme fatigue on the previous night, looked anxiously at her face as she took the letters, but made no comment. Mrs. Greene, however, answered the unspoken question, "I had a good night, thank you, and I'm not tired today."

She laid a hand on Miss Dorset's arm and added, "You're a nice, restful creature to have about."

A deep, unbecoming flush spread over Miss Dorset's sallowness at the unusual tribute, but she only said, quietly, "Thank you. I'm very happy here with you," and then waited, with folded hands, for any news or instructions to be imparted to her.

It was a long time before Mrs. Greene leaned back on her pillow and allowed a neat and closely written letter to slip from her fingers on to the bed. She was worrying. A thousand tiny lines creased her forehead, and she pushed back her scanty white hair with a gesture reminiscent of the days when heavy dark wings, smooth and shining like Lavinia's, had swept down from her middle parting to cover the ears that now jutted out like excrescences on her shrunken skull.

"It's not a good idea," she said with an unusual tremor in her voice. "It's a sentimental idea and the children don't hold with sentiment and an-

niversaries and such like, and it will be very difficult for me. In fact, if Edith weren't so set on it, I wouldn't think of going, but you know how my daughter-in-law must always have her way."

"Is it a letter from Mrs. Rodney that is worrying you?" asked Miss Dorset.

"I told you it was," answered Mrs. Greene. "Here, you'd better read it."

She picked up the letter and handed it to Miss Dorset.

207, Sussex Square.
Nov. 9th.

My dear Mrs. Greene,

Rodney and I were delighted to hear from Lavinia that you were so well and in such good spirits when she saw you at the week-end. We have been hoping to come and see you for the last few weeks, but Rodney has been very busy, and I have had a great deal on my hands since the wedding. I've been supervising Hugh's and Jessica's house being got ready for them, among other things. They come home on Tuesday, evidently very happy and quite sure that no couple ever had a honeymoon like theirs. I have a little plan for them which I do hope you will try and fall in with, as it will be no good at all without you. Aunt Sarah is to be in town next week, I hear, staying with her own relations, and I think it would be such a good idea if you would come up for one night for a little dinner party. Just the family, of course.

Do you realize there are now six Mrs. Greenes? You

and Aunt Sarah, Dora and myself, and the two children, Helen and Jessica. I think Friday week would be best. Rodney will come himself to fetch you in the car, and you can have a long rest before dinner, and motor home on Saturday. Now don't say no, I have really set my heart on having a reunion of the three generations.

Rodney sends his love and is hoping to see you.

Much love from

EDITH.

Miss Dorset read this through carefully, reflected for a moment, and then said, decisively: "I don't think it would be wise for you to go, Mrs. Greene; you've been very easily tired the last few weeks, and this time of year is trying. Will you not dictate a letter for Mrs. Rodney, saying you don't feel able to accept her invitation?"

"I don't call that an invitation," said Mrs. Greene, forcibly. "More like a command. My daughter-in-law arranges everything for everybody and sends them their instructions."

Her voice lost its vibration and dropped on a flat note as she added: "It's easier to fall in with her plans, than to hold out against them; I'm getting old. And perhaps it will please Rodney to have me in his house again, though it's more hers than his."

A long silence fell. Miss Dorset had no comment to offer and Mrs. Greene was obviously im-

mersed in painful thoughts. Suddenly she roused herself and leaned forward, speaking with such calmness and certainty that her words borrowed the force of oratory.

"When a woman has lived with her husband and loved her husband for over fifty years, she shouldn't live on after him. She's only a cripple. There's no place left for her, and no power. I saw one of my sons marry a girl I didn't like, and the other a girl I despised. I lost Edwin in the war, and Edwin's son soon after. Geoffrey and I were old; we were on the shelf, but we still had our place in life. Now Geoffrey's dead, and I'm lost. I'm Grannie and Great-grannie; I'm an old woman, to be humored and treated kindly and encouraged, and taken here and there for her own good, but I'm not Mrs. Geoffrey Greene. She's dead."

Mrs. Greene had spoken with long pauses between the sentences. When she had finished she closed her eyes and sat upright and motionless, drained of color, teeth and hair assailed by the greedy years, but with the lovely structure of jaw and cheek bone more visible under the sagging skin than it had ever been under the firm flesh.

"I don't think you should let Mrs. Rodney's

letter depress you," hazarded Miss Dorset at last. "If you decide to go, I know both she and Mr. Rodney will make all arrangements for your comfort."

"Everybody makes arrangements for my comfort," said Mrs. Greene, harshly. "And nobody can achieve it for me."

She spoke with her eyes still shut, and there was bitter resignation in the line of her mouth.

"We do try," ventured Miss Dorset, gently. At the sound of her troubled voice Mrs. Greene lifted her lids and smiled.

"I know you do," she said, and her voice had regained its ring. "I'm an ungrateful, cantankerous old woman, and I may last like this for years."

The crudity of the last sentence was the signal for Miss Dorset to change the subject.

"Would you like to get up now?" she asked. "You have a nice full day before you: it's so sunny this morning that I think a little walk will do you good, and then you remember Mrs. Hugh is coming for tonight on her way up to town. She arrives at four-fifteen and I've ordered the car to meet her."

"I'd forgotten Sarah was coming today," said Mrs. Greene. "I'll be glad to see her. I won-

der if she has heard from Edith; she'll be no more pleased than I am about this ridiculous party."

All her good humor came back at the malicious and delightful thought of imparting the unwelcome news to her sister-in-law and discussing with her the unreasonableness of such a plan.

"Sarah will see that it's a bad idea," she repeated, confidently. "There'll we be, three widows and three wives, each of us supposed to stand for something, and the whole idea quite false. I'm not an old Greene grandmother any more than Edith is a Greene mother and Jessica a young Greene wife; I'm Margaret Hill, and Jessica is Jessica Deane, and we married men of the same name and the same blood, but nobody but Edith would ever expect that to link us up in a chain."

"I know you will enjoy a talk with Mrs. Hugh," said Miss Dorset. "Shall I put her in the usual room, or do you think she likes the view from the front better? It isn't such a good room, of course."

"Put her in the front room. Sarah is like me—she likes to look out on a good view and a wide space, and so long as the bed is comfortable she

won't notice anything else. And now help me up, please."

The business of getting Mrs. Greene dressed for the day was exhausting both for her and for Miss Dorset, but there were few days in the year when her indomitable courage and vitality allowed her to lie abed and forgo the effort for twenty-four hours. The irritation involved in thrusting out each leg to have its stocking drawn on was so intense as to amount to pain; her back ached and her skin tingled. It was infinite weariness to get her arms into her sleeves and keep her head steady to have her hair done, but Mrs. Greene faced these ordeals with fortitude and equanimity.

Every morning the indignity of physical helplessness struck her afresh, but every morning she banished the thought with resolution and ignored in conversation the difficulties of her toilet. Her good humor never failed her here, and Miss Dorset was too well versed in the intricacies of her employer's code of reticence ever to provoke her by an allusion to the matter in hand.

Usually during that painful three-quarters of an hour they discussed the news of the day which both had absorbed during breakfast, Mrs. Greene with genuine interest in current activities, Miss Dorset uninterested, except in so far as they pro-

vided a topic of discussion attractive to Mrs. Greene. Mrs. Rodney's letter, however, altered the trend of Mrs. Greene's conversation for this one morning.

"What dress have I got to wear at my daughter-in-law's dinner?" she asked, crisply. "I won't wear black and I think my gray satin is getting shabby."

"I think perhaps it is a little," agreed Miss Dorset. "But it always looks very nice."

"Shabby and very nice don't go together," was the uncompromising reply. "We'll write to Madame Fenella today and ask her to send down a fitter with some patterns of gray satin and brocade. I'll wear my diamond necklace, and gray is a good background. You know, Miss Dorset, I've always liked nice dresses."

"I know you have, Mrs. Greene; all your things have been beautiful as long as I've known you."

"But it was before you knew me that I had my best things," said Mrs. Greene, staring into the mirror, but not seeing the face, ragged with age, reflected in it. Seeing herself, instead, forty, fifty, and sixty years ago when she was ardent and lovely.

"There was a sea-green poplin," she said, dreamily. "A silk poplin that Geoffrey liked

very much. That was the summer when Edwin was ten. I remember going up in it to kiss him good night. And before that there was a blue velvet—peacock blue, we called it—with a tight bodice and a flounced skirt all drawn to the back. But when I was a girl, before I married, it was always white. I remember asking my mother for a red evening dress, but she wouldn't hear of it, so I didn't get one till long after I married—and then it didn't suit me."

Mrs. Greene smiled, thinking of the red dress that had been a failure, and then went on, musingly:

"I don't know why it didn't suit me. Lavinia is very like what I was at her age, and she looks so pretty in red, but Geoffrey liked me best in green and blue, and I used to dress to please him."

"I think you always look very nice in gray, and of course, as you say, it's a lovely background for your jewels," said Miss Dorset, whose sole conversational aim was to direct Mrs. Greene down pleasant paths and by-ways and prevent, if possible, any comparison between the empty present and the rich past.

On this occasion she was fortunate. An expression of real pleasure lit up Mrs. Greene's faded eyes. She spoke with assurance.

"You know, Miss Dorset, it's a long time since I wore my diamond necklace; in fact, it's a long time since I went over my jewels at all. I think, with the party coming off, I'd really better look through them."

"I'm sure it would be a good plan," agreed Miss Dorset.

"Very well, then, we'll go out now. I'm ready, am I not? And this afternoon you'll open the safe and I'll go over all my things. Geoffrey did love to give me jewels. You know I used to be very dark, and he always thought them very becoming to me."

"You'll be quite busy, then," said Miss Dorset, relieved to think that the day promised to be a full and interesting one for Mrs. Greene; for once there was a definite little plan for each of the yawning intervals between meals.

To Miss Dorset each day presented itself as a problem in four sections: in each section some trivial interest or occupation had to be provided for old Mrs. Greene, whose mental outlook, though still vivid, could not avoid being impinged upon by her physical limitations. There was the long interval between getting dressed and lunch time which could only be comfortably filled by a walk. Miss Dorset registered an aggrieved re-

sentment against Providence for any lapse from fine weather conditions between 11 A.M. and 1 P.M. Subconsciously she felt that it was Mrs. Greene's prerogative to enjoy the sun for these two hours.

The shorter interval between lunch and tea was partially filled by a rest, and often by preparations for some visitor who was coming to tea and whose visit involved for her punctilious hostess a change of dress and shawl.

The hour after tea was often a difficult and irritable time, particularly in winter when the heavy curtains had to be drawn early, and Mrs. Greene could not sit at her drawing-room window, gazing over the fields to the little larch wood that darkened and thickened as light faded out of the sky, and then magically thinned again till each twig was separate and visible in the clear darkness.

Sometimes there was a library list to be made, or a parcel of library books to be opened, and to Miss Dorset at least it was a matter of signal importance that the second post arrived at five o'clock. It might contain letters that would keep Mrs. Greene occupied for half an hour.

There was always "Patience," of course, but there were few days when this proved to be anything but a dreary makeshift. Mrs. Greene would lay out the cards, idly pick up the kings and

queens, turn them about as if the designs were new to her, and forget what Patience she had embarked on. Even Miss Dorset's nervous system was not proof against the strain of watching her try to play "Monte Carlo" with cards arranged for "Demon."

After dinner was a blessedly short period, and generally a happy one.

Summer and winter alike Mrs. Greene would come through from the dining-room in a mood of tranquil acquiescence; content either to dream by the open window with the scent of stocks from the flower beds, and hay from the meadows beyond, blowing in on the cool night breeze, or else to sit in front of the fire, gazing at the glowing logs which helped her to focus her mind and recapture elusive memories.

On this November day each section had provided its own solution.

"I think perhaps you should put on something warm," said Miss Dorset, avoiding instinctively any suggestion that she was dictator rather than adviser in the matter of wraps. "It's a lovely sunny day, but there's a cold wind blowing round the corner of the house."

She arranged Mrs. Greene's heavy cape as she

spoke, and then gently took her arm as they began the laborious descent of the stairs.

This safely accomplished and the old lady deposited for a moment on a chair in the hall, Miss Dorset hurried off to fetch her own coat.

"There now, we're all ready," she stated, cheerfully, on her return. "Will you have your walking-stick?"

She handed it to Mrs. Greene and they set off, walking slowly towards the walled garden, where clumps of tattered Michaelmas daisies, some limp and shabby chrysanthemums, and a few stalwart dahlias still defied the coming winter.

A sudden jocose gust of wind swept the leaves along the untidy earthen borders, whirled under Mrs. Greene's cape, and set all the branches rustling and all the treetops tossing madly.

"You're sure this isn't too much for you?" asked Miss Dorset, anxiously.

Everything was in motion—trees, bushes, and tatterdemalion flower heads. Even the earth seemed to move under the restless scattering leaves.

"I like it," she announced, stoutly, and breathed deep of the rich odor of decay that rose like a miasma from the ground. "I like autumn; it's

the time for adventures and fine deeds; it's the bravest season of all."

"That's quite true. I should like to die in the autumn."

Miss Dorset's answer was as totally unexpected as was the intensity with which she spoke. Mrs. Greene looked at her for a moment.

"You're still young," she said. "Death isn't the only adventure left for you as it is for me. You ought to like spring best, when the celandines come out."

Miss Dorset relapsed into her usual quiet, apologetic manner, so strangely at variance with the uncompromising ferocity of her sentiments.

"Spring always seems to me a little silly," she asserted. "It's all so hopeful and promising, and hope and promise are such callow things and fall so soon in ruins."

Suddenly realizing that she had broken one of her inviolable rules in betraying so intimate a glimpse of her personality, Miss Dorset hastily turned into a less personal channel.

"I think the word 'jejune' expresses what I feel about spring, but, as you say, the autumn is a fine season, and today is really beautiful."

Mrs. Greene held her peace. She had always possessed too much sensibility to frustrate any-

one's means of escape from a conversational predicament. She had never pressed for a confidence. But as they walked down the path and out at the further gate from garden to wood it struck her as strange that there should be this kinship of thought between Miss Dorset and her.

The inequalities of life are very marked, she thought. Most of us arrive at the same conclusion, but the ways in which we reach it are as many as the leaves scuttling at my feet. I lived for seventy-five good years, then Geoffrey died and the lean years came. All that was left was to do the best I could from day to day, trying to be a little stoical and not getting too whining and senile. But here's this poor dried-up creature. She never had a springtime, and yet she lives like me from day to day, getting a little pleasure here and a little comfort there, but really only living towards the grave.

Her heart stirred with pity as she thought of the glowing human relationships that had been her happiness and delight for seventy-five years, contrasted with the absolute emptiness of Miss Dorset's thirty-eight years.

"The trouble is I've lived too long—three years too long; but she's never lived at all."

Inadvertently she spoke aloud, but Miss Dor-

set was quite unaware of the trend of thought that had led to the remark.

"I beg your pardon," she said mechanically, more as a warning to her employer that she was thinking aloud than in expectation of a reply.

Mrs. Greene, however, answered, abruptly:

"There's a ruby-and-diamond brooch in the safe that I'm going to give you when we go through my things this afternoon. I meant to leave it to you, anyhow, but you might as well have it now. I'd like to see you wearing it."

She hardly heard Miss Dorset's surprised and nervous thanks. She was again lost in thought, appreciating with painful clearness her motive in making this impulsive gesture. Life had given nothing to Clara Dorset, so she, Margaret Greene, was giving her a diamond-and-ruby brooch. It seemed somehow inadequate; Mrs. Greene smiled at the thought of how inadequate it was, but she sighed sharply at the tragic futility of all human endeavors to compensate, to strike a balance between loss and gain.

The day had changed for her. The fitful, kindly wind was no longer kindly. It tugged at her hat and made her bones ache cruelly. The white clouds blowing across the sky seemed har-

bingers of rain, threatening to overcast the sun. She felt frail and impotent, and when she said, "I should like to turn back now," there was a quaver in her voice that she tried in vain to conceal.

As they retraced their slow steps Miss Dorset recited in detail her preparations for Mrs. Hugh's arrival.

"I've put two big vases of leaves in her bedroom," she said. "There really aren't any flowers left worth picking and the leaves are a beautiful color."

"Sarah's garden at Lynton will be full of flowers. They bloom for her all the year round, but I'm no gardener."

Mrs. Greene was regaining her serenity.

"What are we giving her for dinner?" she asked. "Sarah pays no attention to what she eats, but I'd like to give her such a good dinner that she'll be bound to notice it."

"Well, I had thought of a good clear soup, some stuffed fillets of sole, a pheasant, and a nice apricot cream," said Miss Dorset, tentatively, "but that can easily be changed if you would like something more elaborate."

"I don't like elaborate things," answered Mrs.

Greene; "but Sarah never thinks of anything so mundane as food and it's good for her to meet a materialist like me."

She reflected for a moment and then pronounced, decisively:

"Yes, that's a good dinner. But not apricot cream. Tell cook to make a peach tart with our own bottled peaches, and to give us a good hot savory after it, and tell her to put enough sherry in the soup. I don't know why, but when there's no man to cook for, they won't put sherry in the soup or rum in the trifles."

Mrs. Greene spoke energetically. Careless herself as to what she ate, she had always held it important not only that her glass and silver should be beyond reproach, but that the food served to guests should be delicately chosen and delicately cooked.

"There's a lot to be learned from food," she continued in a ruminating vein. "Take Sarah, for instance. After a dinner at Lynton you can't help knowing she's a good gardener because of her fruit and vegetables, but you can't help seeing she isn't discriminating; she gives you nourishment without quality. And think of Edith. Every meal I've eaten in that house has stamped

her afresh as a practical, unimaginative, uninteresting woman."

"I hadn't really thought of it, but I'm sure there's a lot in what you say," agreed Miss Dorset. "Here we are back again. Shall we go in now or would you like another little turn?"

"I would not," Mrs. Greene replied, crisply. "I'll go in and warm myself till lunch time; this wind chills my bones."

The warm atmosphere of the house after the tang of the fresh November air brought a gentle consciousness of fatigue that did not dissipate during lunch time, and Mrs. Greene was not reluctant to go upstairs for her afternoon rest.

Sometimes the indignity of returning to the habits of childhood struck deep into her soul; occasionally she indulged in a rare petulance; but generally she accepted philosophically the restrictions of her narrow life.

"You understand what I want you to do, don't you?" she asked Miss Dorset, on the way up to her room. "Open the safe and get out all the leather cases, and take down my jewel case from my bedroom and put everything ready for me in the library."

"Very well, I'll see to that," answered Miss Dorset; and with the anticipation of a pleasant

task to be performed when she awoke. Mrs. Greene fell asleep.

III

When the time came to waken Mrs. Greene lest a prolonged sleep should spoil her night's rest, Miss Dorset experienced a tremor of the heart, looking at the old face on the pillow.

She perceived more clearly than anyone the ravages wrought by the three years since Geoffrey Greene's death in the body that incased Margaret Greene's ardent but flickering vitality.

Sometimes it was impossible to believe that Mrs. Greene was only sleeping; her face seemed too old, too small, too hollow of cheek and temple, ever to waken to a semblance of life. These stiff, brittle-looking eyelids could surely never lift again; the body outstretched under the eiderdown in a rigid and comfortless abandon could never reassemble itself into the familiar contours of trunk and limbs. Miss Dorset endured a moment's prevision of the inevitable day when she would touch a hand and find it cold; every day she flinched at the thought, but every day she marshaled her resources and bent down to Mrs. Greene with the invariable remark:

"I think perhaps you would like to waken now and get up."

Mrs. Greene wakened slowly and with difficulty. Her first consciousness was of the past. She wakened in the period of her early marriage when her children were young—often with their names on her lips—and she would look vacantly at Miss Dorset for a few moments while her brain went roaming down the long years past the familiar landmarks of marriages, births, and deaths, till it fetched up at last with a consciousness of her present situation, recognition of Miss Dorset, and with a final detailed knowledge of the month, the day, and her immediate plans.

Even so, for a little while her conversation was disjointed; she referred to her grandchildren by her children's names, and it seemed a cruelty to expect her to assume the burden of rational thought.

Today the struggle was not so prolonged as usual.

"Yes, I should like to get up now," she said, still lying motionless, but collecting her forces for the effort. "Edith will be here soon and I musn't be late for tea."

"It's Mrs. Hugh who is coming, not Mrs. Rodney," Miss Dorset corrected, gently.

"Yes, yes, I know it is; that's what I said," replied Mrs. Greene, testily. "Get me up now. I'll put on my good blue dress and the shawl Lavinia gave me."

Changing in the afternoon was a much simpler matter than dressing in the mornnig. Some of the troubled vagueness and docility of interrupted sleep still hung about Mrs. Greene, and she hardly noticed that her body was being turned this way and that, her hair brushed, and her frock fastened.

"Everything is ready for you if you still feel you would like to go over your jewels," suggested Miss Dorset on the way downstairs.

"Of course I would. I hadn't forgotten," snapped Mrs. Greene, whose irritability proclaimed clearly that she had indeed forgotten.

Miss Dorset opened the library door and disclosed the thin November sunlight streaming over the open cases laid out on a table, setting the diamonds aglitter and shining into the heart of rubies and sapphires.

Mrs. Greene stopped in the doorway and drew a quick breath of pleasure.

"They look very fine," she said, excitedly. "I didn't know I had so much. Of course there are some of my mother's jewels there, as well as

Geoffrey's mother's, and all the things he gave me."

She moved over to the table and sat down, lifting up her diamond necklace and pendant to pore over its intricate but austere design.

"Isn't this beautiful?" she asked, not waiting for an answer. "Geoffrey gave it me after his first very successful book. We took a house in the country so that he could be free to finish it without interruptions, and he wrote all the summer. It was a lovely summer, too, although Edwin's engagement in the autumn upset us all, rather. We didn't think it very wise. However, Mr. Greene got his book finished, and it came out in November and was very successful indeed, and this is what he gave me the Christmas after. I remember thinking it was terribly extravagant of him, but of course I didn't know then that his book would go so well in America."

"It is a wonderful necklace," said Miss Dorset, holding it up to the sunlight.

"Well, that's not the way to look at it. Put it against a piece of dark stuff if you want to see it properly."

She drew a pair of slender emerald ear-rings towards her.

"These would do nicely for Lavinia some day,"

she began, but broke off and picked up a little gold ring set with an insignificant sapphire.

"Miss Dorset, look at this," she exclaimed. "That's what Geoffrey gave me after his very first book was published."

She looked at it reminiscently, not hearing Miss Dorset's comment of: "Indeed. How very interesting!"

"It was not long after we were married," she said, presently, "We married young, you know, and old Mr. Greene was very angry with Geoffrey for making writing his career. He had been in his father's engineering works first of all and then he found he was too unhappy to go on with it. I was engaged to him then and I encouraged him to go on with his writing. I said I'd marry him as soon as he liked and not mind about being poor, but he wasn't to start on a career he didn't care for. So I went to papa and said I was going to marry Geoffrey at once, and would do it more happily if I had his permission."

Mrs. Greene laughed her quiet, infrequent laugh as she added, contentedly.

"I was a bold young thing, you know. In those days it was a different matter to beard your father. But I didn't care for anything but Geoffrey, and

papa behaved very nicely to me. He gave me this as one of my wedding presents."

She groped among the cases, opened one, and displayed an old-fashioned round brooch consisting of a large amethyst surrounded by pearls in an elaborate gold setting.

"It looks clumsy now," she said, touching it with kindly fingers, "but round brooches were all the fashion then and I was very pleased with it. Mamma was very angry about my marriage, but then she was a very narrow woman; she never moved with the times."

Miss Dorset enjoyed a momentary flash of insight. She perceived that the old lady sitting beside her, herself a great-grandmother, was speaking of her mother, whose memory would normally be blurred by the clouds of half a century, in just the tones of clear resentment that any young woman might employ today.

Mrs. Greene was back in the past, and even Miss Dorset caught something of the combined fire and delicacy that must have inspired such independence, such courage, and—according to the standards of 1870—such immodesty as to enable a betrothed young girl to arrange her own marriage in the teeth of her mother's disapproval.

For a moment it was all so vivid to Miss Dor-

set that she gave way to a spasm of indignation and admiration.

"Parents were far too harsh," she said. "It was shocking of the old father to try and push Mr. Greene into a business he didn't care for, but it must be splendid for you to think how you helped Mr. Greene to succeed."

Mrs. Greene only answered by a vague, "What do you say?"

She had leaped thirty years and was fingering rather sadly a star sapphire beautifully set in diamonds to form a brooch. Presently she laid it down and, sitting with her hands folded in her lap, fell into one of these wide-awake trances that ended too often in melancholy.

"What a beautiful brooch that is!" ventured Miss Dorset.

There was no answer and no indication that Mrs. Greene had even heard the remark.

Miss Dorset tried again.

"Is it a star sapphire?" she asked. "I don't think I've ever seen one like that."

Mrs. Greene roused herself, but she spoke heavily and limply.

"Yes, it's a star sapphire. Geoffrey gave it to me." There was a long pause. "We had a quarrel," she said at last; "nothing very much; it

began just as a disagreement of opinion, but I was very hot-tempered; I always said more than I meant. So Geoffrey gave me this brooch," she ended, inconsequently, a little furrow of pain forming between her eyebrows at the recollection.

Miss Dorset murmured something inaudible, unable to offer any comfort for a quarrel which had begun and ended probably thirty years ago. Rather awkwardly, anxious to make a diversion, she moved some cases nearer to Mrs. Greene. By chance, one of them contained the brooch which had been spoken of in the morning.

"That's what I want," said Mrs. Greene, triumphantly, her depression completely banished. "That's the brooch I want you to have; it was another of my wedding presents and I used to wear it a great deal, but I never wear rubies now, and I would like you to have it."

It was a very fine ruby. The sun lit up its dark wine-colored heart and turned to fire the diamond pentacle in which it was set.

Miss Dorset caught something of its glow and radiance.

"I can't possibly thank you," she said. "I've never had anything so lovely before. It will give me real happiness."

With an unusually impulsive and graceful

movement she lifted Mrs. Greene's hand and kissed it.

The old lady was amazed at the happiness she had caused. She remembered her thoughts of the morning. The brooch had seemed then a cold and trivial thing. Now, lying on Miss Dorset's hand, enriched by her unconcealed pleasure, it became a warm symbol of affection and gratitude.

Mrs. Greene thought of services rendered, of fine discretion, of considerateness carried far beyond the borders of duty into the realm of intuition, and she was filled with immense satisfaction. There were good things in life—loyalties, restraints, disinterested devotion. One lived from day to day, from year to year, and at the end it was bitten deep into the mind that baseness was transitory, but that good quality endured.

Mrs. Greene braced herself.

"Miss Dorset," she said, sternly, "all my life I've cared for the quality of things and people. I'm old now, old enough to know the truth that lies in platitudes, but if you see me slipping into an easy tolerance and putting up with the second-rate, you'll know that I'm dead, though my body lives on."

Miss Dorset was startled. Inadvertently she

expressed her crude and simple opinion speaking as to an equal, happily forgetful of the responsibility of youth towards age, a responsibility that leads to concealments and subterfuges, to the elimination from conversation of anything that might be unpalatable or alarming; to the whole softening process that makes for safety and, presumably, content.

"Oh no, Mrs. Greene," she said, confidently, "you'll never become tolerant. Young Mrs. Geoffrey often says you live on your critical faculty and that it's my duty to give you something to pull to pieces every day."

Mrs. Greene was delighted. She laughed with pure pleasure.

"Helen says that, does she? Well, she's quite right, I'm a malicious, intolerant old woman, and I don't suppose I'll change now."

At that moment there was the sound of a car drawing up at the front door. Mrs. Greene looked in consternation at Miss Dorset.

"There's Sarah," she said, "and I've done nothing that I meant to do. I haven't even decided whether my necklace needs cleaning or not. You'll have to put all these away now, Miss Dorset, and get them out again tomorrow. But it doesn't mat-

ter; I've had a very happy afternoon and now I'll go into the drawing-room and wait for Sarah."

IV

Mrs. Hugh Greene arrived with a characteristic absence of fuss and impedimenta. She greeted Miss Dorset in the hall with her usual friendly smile, chatted to her for a moment, and then said:

"I'll find Mrs. Greene in the drawing-room, I suppose?"

"Wouldn't you like to take your coat off and have a little rest?" suggested Miss Dorset.

"No, thank you. I'm not tired; it's nothing of a journey—less than two hours in the train."

Mrs. Hugh spoke briskly, and appeared quite fresh and trim in her small old-fashioned hat and the neat dark coat and skirt of a mode which she had first worn ten years ago, and had simply caused to be repeated ever since.

Eight years younger than her sister-in-law, she was at a different stage of life; still active and independent, able to make plans, carry out her arrangements, and work indefatigably in her garden regardless of wind and weather. Miss Dorset, however, looking at her with an eye trained by experience to note each subtle stage of increasing

frailty, thought that Mrs. Hugh was beginning to show her age, and watching her walk through to the drawing-room she decided that her air of youthfulness was deceptive; it was more an effect of manner than of physique. Later, when she rejoined the two old ladies for tea, she was confirmed in her opinion. They were both quite definitely old ladies; one apparently well, the other obviously in broken health, but certainly of the same generation.

She placed a little table beside each of their chairs and busied herself with the tea things.

As she poured out, she was keenly aware of Mrs. Greene's mood, sensitive to the incisive alertness of her speech, without actually hearing what she was saying. All this expenditure of energy would have to be paid for by extra rest. Mrs. Greene's personality might over-ride her bodily ills and lend her a moment of spurious strength, but the consequent nervous reaction would be all the more merciless.

Miss Dorset sighed as she refilled the teacups. The alternatives were so clear. Mrs. Greene could either relax her grip on life and slide into a state of comfortable coma, with no ups and downs, no painful efforts and no particular alleviations, or she could live on for a few years paying a heavy

toll for her good moments in hours of depression and physical malaise. There was no choice; the first was temperamentally impossible.

Miss Dorset sighed again, and then resolutely set herself to join in the conversation.

Mrs. Greene's expression was so deliberately blank as to be provocative.

"Yes," she was saying, "Jessica and Hugh get home on Tuesday, but I shan't be seeing them till the party on Friday, I expect."

"What party do you mean?" asked Mrs. Hugh, innocently.

"Oh, you haven't had your invitation yet?" Mrs. Greene replied, with feigned surprise. "Well, it's a little dinner Edith is giving for the six Mrs. Greenes. It will be so nice to have a reunion that we can all enjoy."

Mrs. Hugh looked aghast.

"I never heard you say anything so fantastic in all your life," she said, decisively. "You may have something in common with your daughters-in-law, but I certainly have not. I never agree with Edith, and I disapprove of Dora."

"I knew you would say that," said Mrs. Greene, triumphantly. "You've got some sense, Sarah. It's a shocking plan, but when Edith gets an idea

into her head you know very well nothing will get it out again."

"Do you mean to say you're taking the trouble to go up to town just to fall in with a whim of Edith's?"

Mrs. Greene looked a little helpless, and Miss Dorset interposed, quickly.

"Mr. Rodney is coming in the car to fetch Mrs. Greene. He is very anxious to have her up in town again, even if it's only for a night."

Mrs. Hugh's rather stern face softened.

"Rodney is a good boy," she said. "You know, Margaret, the last time I saw him it struck me that he was looking very like Geoffrey did at that age."

"Do you think so?" asked Mrs. Greene, eagerly. "I sometimes see it, and then sometimes I can't see it, but I think Hugh is very like his grandfather."

"Not nearly so good-looking. You know Geoffrey was very good-looking, Margaret; he had a fine scholarly head."

"Hugh was handsome, too, Sarah. We were two fine couples in the old days. Lavinia is like what I used to be."

"Yes, I think she is," agreed Mrs. Hugh. "And Martin is a nice little boy, and very sensibly

brought up. Tell me, Margaret," she asked, suddenly, "does it make you feel different to be a great-grandmother? You're at the head of such a long line and I'm so isolated in a way."

She broke off, and then added before Mrs. Greene had time to answer:

"Not that I'm not fond of Rodney and my own nephew, Roger. Only, not having children and children's children makes me feel a little stranded sometimes, now that my own generation has ebbed away and left me high and dry."

Mrs. Greene looked at her intently.

"I didn't know you felt like that, Sarah," she said. "But I tell you this. At our age children are very little use. It's Geoffrey I think of all the time, and I don't doubt but that Hugh is nearly always in your mind."

"That's quite true," answered Mrs. Hugh, simply. "I think it's only natural that such happy marriages as ours were should remain green in our minds. I've never become acclimatized to life without him. Somehow familiar things don't seem so familiar."

Silence fell and Miss Dorset looked at the two quiet figures whose silence covered so adequately their pain and rebellion.

"If you would care for a little rest before din-

ner, I think perhaps we ought to go upstairs now," she suggested.

Mrs. Greene got up, waving away the proffered arm, which she would accept only in the absence of visitors.

"Take Mrs. Hugh to her room," she ordered. "Sarah, we've put you in the front room because of the view; the trees are lovely just now."

"I'm sure they are. It gave me quite a pang to leave Lynton even for a week," said Mrs. Hugh conversationally, as she left the room in the wake of Miss Dorset.

Left alone, Mrs. Greene walked with difficulty over to the window. When Miss Dorset came back she found her standing there, a small crumpled figure, darkly outlined against the orange curtains, gazing at the gathering dusk with the inscrutability of her many years carved round her mouth, but with a mysteriously youthful speculation alight in her eyes.

V

Dinner was a meal of some ceremony.

The two old ladies sat at either end of the table, with Miss Dorset at Mrs. Greene's right, ready to help if her unsteady hands proved un-

equal to the task of cutting her meat, or raising her wineglass, which she insisted on having filled to the precisely correct level.

Mrs. Greene, in spite of her modern outlook, had retained in many ways an old-fashioned eye, and she had never been able to accustom herself to the fashion for bare tables. It struck her as slightly barbaric, not in keeping with the solemn tradition that had built itself up around the ritual of dinner, a tradition that to her mind necessitated the use of fine linen, heavy silver, and good china. Candlelight, too, was abhorrent to her. The flicker of each separate candle, and the alternate dark patches and uncertain pools of light on the table which she considered should be illuminated by a steady radiance, suggested to her something slightly decadent and certainly grotesque. So the table was lit from directly above, by a round brass fitting, each of whose five globes was covered by a rose silk shade. This, with sconces on every wall, effectively dissipated the gloominess of the severe, shadowy room.

This evening one of the finest damask cloths with inlets of lace at each corner had been put on in honor of Mrs. Hugh, and the heavy silver bowl in the center, with its four attendant silver vases arranged diamond-wise, contained the last

poor blooms from the garden, mixed witn leaves whose colors ranged from saffron through orange and russet to flaming scarlet.

It was in keeping with Mrs. Greene's love of formality that the conversation at dinner should run along prescribed lines. General topics of any sort—trivial or abstruse—she welcomed, but forbade anything of a personal nature to be discussed; gossip must be kept for the drawing-room. This was sometimes a severe trial to Miss Dorset, who at the end of a wearisome day found herself forced to eschew just those comfortable irrelevances which were all that occurred to her tired mind.

Mrs. Hugh, however, like Mrs. Greene, was of that self-effacing generation of women that had been brought up to make conversation at dinner with the sole purpose of entertaining the gentlemen, and she perfectly understood why clothes and personalities were permissible in one room and taboo in another.

Accordingly, throughout the meal the two old ladies were accustomed to exchange a number of superficial generalizations which both were too fatigued to pursue.

Mrs. Greene's single moment of animation was also one of indignation.

"You've not drunk your sherry," she said, crossly. "It's still the sherry that Geoffrey laid down, and I've got enough palate left to know that it's good. Why don't you drink it?"

"You know I never care very much about wine," Mrs. Hugh replied. "I think the only thing I really enjoy is a glass of good claret."

Mrs. Greene smiled.

"I remembered that," she said. "I told them to bring up a bottle of the Ponte-Canet. We had some up last time Rodney was here, and it's got a beautiful bouquet."

"I shall enjoy that, Margaret," said Mrs. Hugh. "You know I've never had to add anything to the cellar since Hugh died. Sometimes I've been very sorry to think of the 1906 Veuve Clicquot going past its best; in fact, once or twice I've thought of giving it to one of the young couples, but young people don't seem to have cellars nowadays."

"That's true," Mrs. Greene's assent was a little morose. "They don't go in for anything so permanent. If they want something to drink, they just ring up a shop and order a few bottles."

"There have been great changes in the last twenty years," reflected Mrs. Hugh. "Some for the worse, no doubt, and many for the better, but

I confess I no longer find myself able to adapt very readily. I'm too old to change."

This was dangerously like an expression of personal feeling, and Mrs. Hugh hastily covered her tracks by asking Mrs. Greene's opinion of a new book of travel.

Dinner progressed slowly. The pheasant appeared; three small slices of breast were eaten by the three ladies; it was removed and the peach tart took its place. Mrs. Hugh, for courtesy's sake, toyed with a minute piece of pastry; Miss Dorset enjoyed a reasonable helping; but Mrs. Greene lacked the energy even to taste it. It was succeeded by a savory, which again for courtesy's sake all three ladies made an effort to eat.

At last the interminable meal was ended. A little food had been eaten, a little wine drunk, and a prolonged exhibition of fortitude and good manners had been given by Mrs. Greene, whose weakness clamored for the easy comfort of a tray by the fire, but whose instincts and training drove her to endure the full ceremony prescribed by the laws of good society.

She was very tired when they went through to the drawing-room. She sat relaxed and huddled in her armchair, stretching out her chill hands to the fire, which leaped and spluttered.

"The logs are green," she said, dreamily, "but I like to hear them hiss like that."

"I like all country sounds and sights," answered Mrs. Hugh.

"That's what you live on, Sarah, I understand very well; Lynton is what you live on from day to day, and you've got Hugh and your past for a background."

There was a pause, broken presently by Mrs. Hugh, who spoke quickly and jerkily in her insistency.

"I find Lynton very lonely," she said. "It's so satisfying and complete. I turn over the earth and take out things and plant other things, and they grow and flower, and when they die I plant something else. And it all goes on round and round, so that I feel quite confident that beauty renews itself even if it doesn't last, and so I'm able to be happy."

Her credo ended abruptly.

"We're optimists, Sarah," said Mrs. Greene. "You know, only this morning I was thinking something like that, but I don't remember now what it was. I forget things, I forget the simplest things sometimes."

"Don't let that worry you," advised Mrs. Hugh, gently. "We all forget things when we're tired."

"I worry when I'm tired," confided Mrs. Greene. "Everything worries me; the thought of Edith's party next week worries me. I don't feel I can face it."

She relapsed into silence. In the glow of the fire her face looked pinched and wan. Suddenly it sharpened into irritation.

"I must go to bed, Sarah," she said. "I'm sorry to leave you so early, but I've talked enough for tonight, and I'll see you in the morning."

She stood up, tremulous and uncertain.

"Miss Dorset," she called, querulously, "help me to bed. Miss Dorset, I'm tired."

CHAPTER II

Mrs. Hugh Greene

I

"WHAT are you doing this morning, Aunt Sarah?" asked Mary Dodds on the first morning of Mrs. Hugh Greene's visit. "I have to do some shopping, but I'd love it if you would come with me."

"No, thank you, dear," answered Mrs. Greene. "I have an appointment at twelve o'clock, and if you'll excuse me I won't come back to lunch."

"You're sure you won't be too tired if you stay out both morning and afternoon?"

Young Mrs. Dodds was genuinely solicitous, and her husband, Roger, added, quietly, "You're not looking too well, Aunt Sarah. Why not see a doctor while you are in town?"

"That is just what I'm doing at twelve o'clock. But you needn't worry, my dears, I'm a little run down, perhaps, and don't forget that I'm seventy this year, so I hardly can expect to be quite as

active as I used to be. But I shall come quietly back and have a rest before tea if I may."

"Let me bring tea up to your room and have it there with you," suggested Mary. "Ellen is out this afternoon, and I shall be getting tea myself, anyhow, and it would be nice for you to have it in bed and then rest on till dinner time."

Mrs. Greene turned to Roger.

"Your wife is the most thoughtful young woman I know," she said, briskly. "You did very well for yourself when you married her."

Roger laughed, kissed Mary, who was pink and flustered, and left for his office.

"You can't think how much nicer you are than most relations-in-law, Aunt Sarah," said Mary, impulsively. "You're so much easier than my mother-in-law, somehow. She expects so much of me that I just get futile and incompetent when she is about."

"I've never had any children, you know, and I think perhaps that makes me less exacting than Elinor. She has always made too many demands on Roger, and that leads to difficulties."

"You're awfully wise," said Mary, slowly. "I think all old people are much wiser than middle-aged ones, especially women; perhaps in ten years' time Mrs. Dodds will be quite sensible."

She smiled at Mrs. Greene, who thought of her uncertain, irritable, dissatisfied sister-in-law, and smiled back at the improbability of her developing into the type of tranquil old lady that Mary seemed to hope for. Then, looking more closely at Mary, she noticed that there was an expression of strain and fatigue on her usually pink and healthy face.

"You're not looking very well, yourself, Mary," she said.

Mary hesitated for a moment.

"I'd like to tell you," she said, uncertainly. "Roger thought I oughtn't to because I haven't told his mother yet, but, after all, you're very discreet, aren't you? We're having a baby in about six months, and he is rather worried about it because we can't really afford it."

Her lip trembled a little, but she steadied her voice and went on: "I'm really glad about it, even though it does mean getting rid of Ellen and having only a cook and economizing a lot, but of course it isn't much fun for Roger, and he does work hard."

"Well, I think that is a very nice piece of news," said Mrs. Greene, warmly. "I shall thoroughly enjoy having a grand-nephew or niece, and you must let me pay your doctor and help

you in any way I can. As a matter of fact, I get tired sometimes of hearing my sister-in-law talking of her great-grandchild and all her grandchildren. You don't know old Mrs. Greene, do you? She's a delightful woman, but sometimes I feel she forgets there are other young couples in the world besides Lavinia and Martin and the young Geoffreys, and now the Hughs."

"Thank you ever so much, Aunt Sarah; it's lovely of you, and it will be a weight off Roger's mind. He does work so hard, and he earns so little."

Mary's voice rose almost to a wail, but Aunt Sarah only said, crisply:

"Oughtn't you to go and see the cook now? You mustn't bother about me; I'll write a letter or two before I go out."

Young Mrs. Dodds gulped a little and blew her nose, but as the parlormaid came in, cast an injured glance at the two ladies still sitting over the breakfast table, and then swept out with pursed lips, she was sufficiently in command of herself to laugh and say: "I shan't mind getting rid of her, anyhow. She's horribly haughty."

Mrs. Greene, left alone, sat for a moment in thought before she crossed the hall to the small living-room. She wondered how Roger's inade-

quate income was going to be stretched to meet the demands of the unborn child which was already beginning to assume a definite importance in her mind.

I'm as bad as Margaret, she thought, I didn't really care so very much when her great-grandchild was born, and yet it was my great-grandnephew, after all. But there is something more intimate about this one; it's a Dodds, and I feel possessive about it. Odd that, after being Mrs. Hugh Greene for nearly fifty years, I should still be Sarah Dodds.

Her thoughts turned back to Roger. Something ought to be done for him; his position in the rather depressing solicitor's office where he worked was unsatisfactory.

As Ellen again entered the room, armed with a formidable frown and a tray, Mrs. Greene went across the hall and sat down to write. She found herself unable to concentrate on her letters. Either the thought of the impending interview was draining her of her usually resolute vitality or the news that Mary had given her had provoked an emotional reaction.

Her heart stirred almost painfully as she thought of Roger—his enduring good qualities, his affection for her, his social inadequacy and

uncouthness that concealed a good brain and a sense of humor. She had been pleased with his marriage to Mary, the least exacting of women, unaware of most of her husband's deficiencies, and tolerant of those she recognized.

A small sinister idea insinuated itself into Mrs. Greene's mind. Unaware that she spoke aloud, she formulated her fear in words.

"Perhaps on this bright November day I shall have to make my will, and then Mary need not economize over her baby."

The rich autumn sun struck a shaft across the desk that warmed her chill hand, but Mrs. Greene shivered as she looked across the narrow street and steadied herself to accept the immediate future.

II

Dr. Stiff looked at the quiet elderly woman who was sitting on the other side of his desk, and chose his words carefully.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Greene, that I shall have to call upon your courage and fortitude to listen to what I cannot avoid telling you. I gather that your suspicions amounted almost to a certainty before you consulted me, and I am, unfortunately,

forced to confirm them. There is a considerable growth in the left breast which, owing to the state of your heart, can't be removed. That being so, we can only regard it as a definite signal which must not be ignored."

He spoke gently, but the crude fact implicit in his words stuck out clearly. There was a moment's pause. Mrs. Greene's hands were folded in her lap; her throat felt a little dry, and for a moment the walls of the room wavered uncertainly towards her, and the motes dancing in a streak of sun across the floor seemed to swell gigantically and overpoweringly. But as she cleared her throat and prepared to speak, they diminished and the room resumed its normal proportions.

"Thank you," she said, steadily. "I quite understand. You mean that you are not able to operate. How long can I expect to live?"

Dr. Stiff looked distressed at the uncompromising question, and his hand hovered over the bell as he answered:

"The disease is in its final stage, Mrs. Greene. You must have had many attacks of pain recently, and there won't be very many more."

He pressed the bell as he spoke, and almost

immediately a nurse appeared with a little tray containing a glass and a decanter of brandy.

Mrs. Greene smiled. "No, thank you, Nurse," she said, and her voice had its natural buoyancy as she turned to Dr. Stiff. "My husband never liked me to drink spirits of any sort, and this has not been a shock to me. Indeed, in some ways it is almost convenient."

She thought of Roger, and then asked, abruptly:

"Shall I live for six months?"

Dr. Stiff shook his head.

"It's impossible for me to give a definite date," he said. "But I think not more than three."

Mrs. Greene pressed her hand to her treacherous breast as she thought of Mary's and Roger's child that would be born in the spring.

"That is a disappointment to me," she said, "but only a very trivial one. My husband died eight years ago; we were very devoted to each other, and since then I have often felt as if I were waiting with my hat and jacket on for some vehicle to take me to him. Now that fancy is gone. I see that the vehicle is my illness which will soon come to a conclusion, and I thank you very much for your consideration and kindness to me."

She rose to go. For a moment Dr. Stiff held her hand as he said:

"It's I who thank you, Mrs. Greene. My work is very often both trying and depressing, and to meet with such courage and control as yours is a great stimulus to me."

"I'm afraid I'm very old-fashioned," said Mrs. Greene. "I've never learned to take life so vehemently and rebelliously as young people do nowadays. I sometimes think they lack a sense of humor and proportion. Good-by and thank you again."

She left the room, unhurried and untroubled, oblivious of the fact that she left behind her a man filled with amazement at the dignity and decorum of her generation.

As she sat in a taxi on the way to lunch, Sarah Greene was busy with arrangements: first of all she must make an appointment with her solicitors and see to her will. A feeling of warm gratitude to her dead husband shot across her mind as she remembered that he had expressly stated that she was to leave the bulk of his considerable fortune to relations and friends for whom she cared. Lynton was her own, of course, both house and land, but she was glad that she was under no moral obligation to leave Greene money to

Greenes; she was perfectly free to make life as happy and tranquil as an assured income could make it, for Mary and Roger Dodds.

Then a nursing-home must be considered. Mrs. Greene suppressed a slight tremor as she thought of the crudity and awkwardness of a death in the house—the embarrassed, tearful servants; the relations whose perfectly sincere grief could not prevent them feeling an intense relief at the approach of a meal, followed by an equally intense shame at the thought of enjoying food with poor Aunt Sarah lying upstairs; the desultory and spasmodic conversations; the whole painful interregnum between normal life before the death occurred and normal life resumed after the funeral. A nursing-home in London would certainly have advantages. Sarah Greene would be able to die as unobtrusively as she hoped she had lived.

Before finding her way to the restaurant of the large shop in which she intended to lunch, Mrs. Greene made a few methodical purchases. She had intended to buy half a dozen pairs of the thick woolen stockings which she usually wore for gardening, but in view of her curtailed future she mechanically reduced the order to three. She did not, however, hesitate to order a new mackintosh, since her old one was worn out, and a future,

however short, was unthinkable if it withheld from her the promise of rainy walks on soft November afternoons with dusk dropping behind the long row of beeches that bordered the avenue up to Lynton, the house she had loved and cared for these last forty-five years.

Later, while she ate her usual plain lunch, she reviewed deliberately in some detail the sentimental aspect of the situation. Not again would she see the daffodils swaying on their stems in the spring winds that every year swept Lynton; not again would she see the amazing blue of summer skies through the amazing green of beech trees; other hands would snap off the dead pansy heads and pick the lupins ranged along the mellow wall.

A moment of forlornness, grim augury of the desolate weeks ahead, fell upon Sarah Greene, sitting in the crowded restaurant, to outward seeming an elderly woman contentedly eating her lunch. Panic squeezed her heart as she thought of the creeping growth that was working even now to her undoing, but her will automatically reasserted itself. Self-pity was repugnant to her; she was of the generation that held duty to be at the same time an aim and a reward, that accepted

frustrations and tragedies as part of the necessary fabric of life.

As she put down her coffee cup she dealt sharply with herself. Here I am, she thought, sitting in a ridiculous basket chair in a pink-and-white restaurant. I've just finished a pleasant lunch and bought a good mackintosh, and now I'm letting myself get quite maudlin. I'm giving way to foolish fancies over what is only a natural event. Much better go back to Roger's little house and ring up my solicitor to make an appointment for tomorrow.

The thought of this small task was enough to re-establish Mrs. Greene's poise. There were still things to be done that only she could do, and she sighed pleasurably as she remembered that the Lynton gardens, greedy like all gardens in their demand for time, care, and skilled forethought, would claim her as long as she could respond to any claim.

As she talked to Mary a couple of hours later, Lynton was still uppermost in her mind, and her interest in the various aspects of Mary's coming maternity was kindly but perfunctory.

Mary was the perfectly conventional middle-class prospective mother, enjoying all the emotions possible to a first pregnancy: pride in her own ade-

quacy; pride in the interest and the faint spice of danger that would be attached to her for the next few months—though, as she eagerly assured Aunt Sarah, "The doctor is frightfully pleased with me. He says I'm ideally fitted to be a mother"; pride in Roger's love and anxiety, and an overwhelming pleasure at the thought of a small naked body to be intricately clothed in wools and muslins, laces and ribbons.

"I feel it's going to be a girl," she said, positively. "And I'm going to make her the loveliest little frilled cloak with a tiny bonnet to match."

"As a matter of fact, Mary," answered Aunt Sarah, equally positively, "I think it will be a boy."

A look of keen delight suddenly lit up her face.

"My dear," she said, "I've just had a delightful idea. Will you have your baby at Lynton? I should so much like him to be born there. It would give me the greatest pleasure to look forward to the crocuses and hyacinths coming out just about the right time. You would be very comfortable there, and I can promise you I would not inconvenience you in any way."

"It's awfully kind of you, Aunt Sarah." Mary spoke gratefully. "It would be ideal, of course. I've been worried about a nursing-home; they're

so expensive and this house is terribly inconvenient. It's so small, and the hot water is all downstairs, and that *is* awkward when you're in bed. Besides, I don't believe Roger would mind my being away from him. After all, it's only an hour and a half to Lynton."

"I very much hope you'll arrange it, Mary."

"I really would love it."

"Well, I want you to make a definite plan and keep to it. I have several reasons for asking this. I don't want anything that may happen to upset your plan."

"Nothing is likely to happen." Mary's thoughts were concentrated entirely on herself and her condition, "Everything is quite normal, and I'm sure it will go all right."

"I'm quite sure, too," answered Aunt Sarah. "I wasn't really thinking of that. Things do change, you know, dear, and arrangements sometimes have to be altered, but I don't want anything to interfere with this. You must talk it over with Roger. Now tell me, Mary, do you feel well enough to go to a play tonight? I have a fancy for you and Roger and me to have a little celebration. If it doesn't put you out at all, I suggest that we dine at the Berkeley and go to a theater."

"I'd love it. Thank you very much. Shall I go and telephone to Roger and tell him not to be late?"

"Yes, do, Mary; and ask him to get three stalls for any good play that we will all enjoy."

"I'll get tea, too, when I'm downstairs," said Mary, happily. "I do hope you don't mind my having to do it. I really didn't dare ask Ellen to stay in, and there's never any use expecting cook to do anything extra."

At the thought of Ellen and cook, Mary nervously wrinkled her forehead, but the frown was chased away by an expression of amazed relief as a new idea dawned on her.

"Aunt Sarah, if I have my baby at Lynton, I shan't have to bother the least bit about servants or dust or Roger's meals or anything. How perfectly marvelous!"

As Mary closed the door rather noisily, Sarah Greene's sensibilities shrank from such a robustly common-sensible point of view being applied to her romantic project. The idea of new life in Lynton house, coinciding with so much vigorous new life in Lynton gardens, was compensation to her for her own death. It struck the right balance; more, it pleased her always fastidious sense of the fitness of things that she, an old woman,

should die before the turn of the year when sap springs in the bough, and that her grandnephew should be born in her house at the time when apple trees blossom and lambs play in the field.

This pastoral conception sustained a rude shock when Mary translated it into terms of dust and domestics.

Mary is a genuinely good, capable girl, she told herself; not imaginative, perhaps, but with courage and intelligence and most of the qualities that Roger needs in a wife. Even so it was difficult to see Mary at Lynton, ordering the household, planning new effects for the misty herbaceous border, lavishly stocking the formal beds, attentive to the diurnal duties towards flowers and trees and shrubs.

Sarah Greene thought of her other young relations: Lavinia, mondaine, vivid, with a delicate certainty of touch that enabled her to cover her essential sophistication with a delightful veneer of country simplicity.

Lavinia, in green linen, stooping over the rose beds in the sunlight was perfect; Lavinia, in scarlet silk, stepping out of the French window to the moonlit terrace was perfect; her clothes for a country week-end were admirable. But Lavinia waking day after day to the sound of steady rain

was unimaginable. She would find herself without interests and without resources.

Mrs. Greene decided quite firmly that Lavinia would not do for Lynton.

Helen and Geoffrey were not more promising candidates. Geoffrey's manifest uneasiness in tweeds, his distaste for country pursuits, no less than Helen's restlessness and impatience, rendered them ineligible.

Helen really paints well, thought Mrs. Greene. It's a pity she so seldom finishes anything, and that when she does she just tosses it aside and begins at once on something new.

A vision of Helen frenziedly digging up week-old bulbs to see if they had sprouted crossed Mrs. Greene's mind and she smiled.

Only Hugh and Jessica remained. But Jessica, the youngest Mrs. Greene, with her small creamy face, her cool incisiveness to the world, and her passionate gentleness to Hugh, could never belong to Lynton. She was too slight and too brittle. At moments she seemed as vibrant as spun glass; at moments she dimmed into a moony vagueness. There was no stability about her; she never would move with Lynton, through the steady roll of the seasons, taking note of the al-

most imperceptible signs that herald growth and decay.

Thinking it over, Mary was really much the most suitable. There was something slow moving and deep rooted about her; she was practical, but not trivial; she did not spend herself on details, but she never ignored them and she could take a long view of things. She was free from petty spites and envies and she and Roger would do very well. As Sarah Greene reached this conclusion the door opened to admit Mary with the tea-tray and a letter, addressed in Mrs. Rodney Greene's unmistakable writing.

"Oh, Mary, I knew that letter was coming, but I'd forgotten about it."

"Is is something tiresome?"

"No, not exactly. It's an invitation to dinner next week at the Rodneys, but I don't feel like meeting people just at present."

Sarah Greene drew the letter rather reluctantly from its envelope and read it:

207 Sussex Square.
9th Nov.

My dear Aunt Sarah,

Many thanks for your kind letter after the wedding. I am so glad you thought it all went off nicely and that you weren't too tired.

I expect you have heard that Hugh and Jessica got back on Tuesday after a delightful honeymoon, apparently. We have had several very happy post-cards from them, though I must say I should have liked a letter.

I have planned a little dinner party for them for Friday the 18th, tomorrow week, at 7.45, which I do hope will suit you. It is only a family affair, but I am anxious that all six Mrs. Greenes should meet and enjoy one another, so I very much hope you will be able to come.

With love from Rodney and myself,

Yours affectionately,

EDITH GREENE.

"Mrs. Rodney is having her party next Friday," said Mrs. Greene, slowly. "I hadn't meant to stay in town quite so long."

"Oh, do stay, Aunt Sarah," urged Mary. "We love having you, and if you don't want to go to Mrs. Rodney's we can easily think of something. Why not invent an engagement for that evening?"

Mrs. Greene shook her head.

"No," she said, decisively. "You know I almost think I shall enjoy it, and I think it will be salutary too."

"How do you mean, salutary?"

"Well, you know, my dear, one begins to think oneself and one's own affairs too important; and then, being plunged into a family dinner party like that, one finds how relatively unim-

portant one is. The young people are taken up with their own lives and Mrs. Rodney is busy about her arrangements, and poor Mrs. Edwin is always very preoccupied, and so I shall forget about my own troubles."

"I shouldn't have thought you had any troubles or worries," was Mary's naïve comment, to which Mrs. Greene responded briskly and quite genuinely: "Well, no, Mary, I haven't many. One thing on my mind is my second gardener. He isn't turning out as well as I expected; he has bad hands for planting."

There was a pause as Mary poured out a cup of tea and handed it to her aunt, who thanked her and added:

"You know it's very nice and luxurious to be here like this and have tea brought to me. Now tell me about this evening. What did Roger say?"

"He was delighted," said Mary. "He says he can get away fairly early from the office, and he'll get the tickets on the way home. And he asked me to give you his love and ask what it was you were celebrating."

Mrs. Greene's heart missed a beat. She felt that she could hardly say, "I'm celebrating my death sentence," and yet the melodramatic little

phrase nearly escaped her. She hesitated for a second and then said, quite naturally:

"We're celebrating the very good news you told me this morning, my dear Mary. I'm very happy about it; I shall enjoy having a grand-nephew."

Mary's face glowed with pleasure.

"I never thought you'd be so pleased. Would you like us to call him Hugh if he's a boy?"

Sarah Greene took her hand and held it for a moment.

"It's kind of you to think of it," she said, "but, no, Mary, I don't really think I'd like it. I've never quite believed in calling children after people; it doesn't seem to me to mean very much. I'd rather you just called your boy any name you liked."

"I had thought of Roger, but I'm not sure."

"Well, don't be influenced by any one; just decide what name you like and keep to it. It's only a convention to name children after their relations, and I don't quite believe in conventions that are based on sentiment. Perhaps we get harder as we get older; I'm not sure. But it seems to me that my generation has a good deal in common with yours. We were very differently brought up, of course, but we arrived at rather

the same conclusions as you young people have now—a distaste for anything too easy, or flabby as you might call it."

She turned questioningly to Mary, who reflected for a moment, in the struggle to assemble her thoughts.

"I know what you mean," she said at last. "I do feel we've much more in common with people of your age than people about forty-five or fifty. We're harder than they are, and we take things in our stride, like your generation. I always think you were awfully brave. And we're a greedy generation, but I don't think we're greedy in such a soft way as middle-aged people are."

She stopped again to think, and then added:

"Your generation doesn't strike me as being greedy at all. You were all so awfully good at self-sacrifice."

Mrs. Greene laughed.

"My dear Mary," she expostulated, "that sounds terrible—as if we were all would-be martyrs. Yes, indeed, we were just as greedy as you are, but we wanted different things, and I think we very often wanted them for other people. As wives, we were contented to be a good deal in the background; we liked our husbands to shine and we didn't need so much personal success as women

do nowadays. But it wasn't so very different, after all. I know you want things for Roger more than for yourself, for instance."

"I do want a lot for Roger," agreed Mary, eagerly, and Mrs. Greene exulted in the thought of how much her death would do for this satisfactory and devoted young couple. Money she could give them in her lifetime, but what was money compared with Lynton, whose lovely perfection was solace enough for the bitterness of life and the fear of death.

She switched abruptly off this trend of thought.

"If we are dining early and going out," she said, "it's certainly time I got up and began to think about dressing. And we've never taken the tray down. Let me help you, Mary, like a good child."

But Mary refused help, piled the tray up competently, and left the room.

Mrs. Greene found herself strangely comforted by this short and uneventful conversation. Later, as she dressed, she thought about the young Dodds and their contemporaries. They have good points, these young people, she decided, finally; lots of courage and spirit; and how pleasant it is to think that I, who was brought up a model of deport-

ment, at the end of my life should find myself able to take things in my stride.

She smiled over the phrase. Uncouth and slangy as it was, it seemed to her to show a good enough standard, and when she went downstairs she said, gayly, "Roger, your wife's been teaching me modern slang and I like it."

III

The evening was a very happy one. There was a distinct air of festivity about the elderly woman and her two young companions as they sat in the restaurant enjoying dinner, liking and admiring one another, and full of pleasurable anticipations of the play.

Mary looked pretty. The lamps were becomingly shaded and softened her too pronounced features. Roger's naturally sober manner never lapsed into heaviness, and much of his anxiety had been allayed by the way in which his aunt had not only welcomed the news of his prospective son, but was determined to help at what was undoubtedly a crisis in his affairs. Sarah Greene herself was lost in the pleasure of the moment. As she looked at Roger and Mary and thought of

them at Lynton, her heart was warm and her mind at peace.

"My dear children," she said towards the end of dinner, "I'm very pleased with you both. I want you to be very happy."

"This really *is* a celebration," said Mary, excitedly; "we are enjoying ourselves."

But Roger lifted his glass and, looking at Mrs. Greene, smiled very charmingly.

"I'd like you to drink to our friendship, Aunt Sarah," he said. "I'm thirty-two now, and I've appreciated you for quite twenty years. Our relationship is something I value very highly."

For a moment the emotional tension was high. Rare tears sprang to Sarah Greene's eyes.

"My dear Roger," she stammered, "my dear boy, it is so sweet of you to say that. I'm getting old and I need your affection."

She stopped uncertainly, and Roger saw that her usually imperturbable face was blurred and twisted, the face of an old woman.

Before he had clearly taken in her sudden change of feature Mary intervened.

"But, Aunt Sarah, we never think of you as old, you have such a modern point of view."

Sarah Greene steadied herself and regained her normal tranquil expression.

"I must be getting old," she announced, "because you're making me feel quite sentimental. In fact, the sooner we get off to the theater the better."

She rose and went with Mary to fetch her cloak, perfectly in command of herself again, but a cold breath of foreboding had touched Roger.

All evening, at the theater listening to the play, during the intervals while he talked to his aunt and his wife, even in the taxi driving home, he was teased by the recollection of Mrs. Greene's face. He felt as if he had been given a clue to some puzzle, but not a final clue that would unravel it.

Later, as he was falling asleep he thought, contentedly: Well, anyhow, she'll be here for ten days. Perhaps she'll tell me. I might be able to help, whatever it is.

IV

Sarah Greene wakened in the night straight from deep sleep to considerable pain.

She had wakened often these last few months to that same rending pain which numbed her elbow, ran up her arm, stabbed fiercely at her arm-

pit, and concentrated itself in an agonizing grasp of her left breast.

She had lain on her back, panting and sweating, conscious of her heart thumping unevenly, waiting for the first moment of relief when she would be able to stretch out her hand for the opiate that was always ready by her bed—an opiate too mild to give sleep, but strong enough to dull the edge of the attack.

When this stage had been reached and she was no longer abandoned to the horror of the moment, Mrs. Greene almost invariably found herself betrayed into moments, and even hours, of pure panic, when speculation as to the nature of her disease forced itself on her reluctant mind.

Time and again she had brought herself to the point of deciding to see a specialist, time and again she had told herself that she knew what it was, and she would repeat: I know what is wrong with you, Sarah Greene; but always there had been an element of uncertainty to torment her with a hope too frail to build on but too tough to disregard.

These hours of desperate indecision had culminated at last in the appointment with Dr. Stiff, whose verdict left no loophole, as Mrs. Greene remembered when the pain began to subside.

And now she was conscious of a feeling of com-

fortable relaxation. The ugly possibility, established as an inevitable fact, had lost its horror; it simply had to be accepted and dealt with.

Lying there with her face turned to the small window of Mary's spare bedroom, Sarah Greene found that she was perfectly happy. Now that no further struggle was possible and that a conclusion had been reached, she had fallen into a condition of luxurious restfulness, which she decided would probably last till her death, broken, of course, by successive bouts of pain and by small variations of mood. But fundamentally she was at ease and likely to remain so.

A small wind blew along the street between the two rows of tall narrow houses, and fluttered the curtains at her window.

She sighed. It was a London wind; even in the cool of the autumn night long before dawn, it was a London wind. She got up restlessly, put on a dressing-gown, and sat down in a chair beside the low window.

The house opposite seemed indecently near and indecently small. There could be no dignity of life in so cabined a space. Everywhere she saw a huddle of houses and chimneys. Wind blew along the street again and a casement curtain flapped out of the window opposite and filled her

with distaste. It was so close to her, this grotesquely flapping piece of linen that belonged to people whose names she did not know, whose lives were alien to hers.

A sudden nostalgia for Lynton broke like a storm in her heart; Lynton where her windows looked out on lawns and fields and beech trees, and even the sky seemed more remote.

She stood up, her fingers pressed nervously on the window-sill, and whispered: "I must go back to Lynton; I must go at once. It's impossible to spend a whole week in town. I'll go tomorrow."

There was a gentle knock at the door. Resentful of any intrusion, she said, sternly, "Come in," and waited, a rigid small figure at the window.

Roger came quietly round the door and shut it carefully.

"May I come in for a few minutes?" he asked. "Mary's asleep, but I wakened up and heard you moving about, and thought I'd like to come and talk to you. I've had a feeling all evening that there was something wrong, or not exactly wrong —I don't quite know."

He broke off uncertainly, then lifted a chair over to the window and said, gently:

"Let's sit and talk for a little. Will you tell me if there's anything on your mind?"

Mrs. Greene sat down again. Her resentment had died. Roger in pajamas and dressing-gown looked young and tentative, and yet there was about him an air of steadfastness that suited the occasion. She looked at him and said, lightly,

"My dear, this is a very funny scene—you and I sitting here at the window in the middle of a cold November night."

But Roger only answered,

"Don't put me off, Aunt Sarah. I feel there is something wrong, and I do want you to tell me."

She sat silent. It never had occurred to her to take anyone into her confidence—the thought of being pitied was too upsetting—but Roger was different. He would be able to help; he was strong and reliable and dignified. Supposing she told him, he would not obtrude his knowledge of her secret during the next few months, and indeed he must be fond of her, she decided, or he never would have guessed at the existence of any trouble, for he was not naturally intuitive.

She took a rapid decision and then spoke.

"I'm glad you came in tonight, Roger. I *would* like to tell you something rather important both to you and to me. I had never thought of telling anyone, but now I feel I would like to do so."

She paused for a moment, looking down into the quiet street, and then continued:

"I saw a specialist today, as you know, and he told me what I've feared for some months, Roger dear, and they can't operate or do anything for it."

Unconsciously she tightened her grasp of his hand and hurried on: "And you see, dear, I haven't much time left—only a few months, in fact—and you can help me to arrange all sorts of things if you will."

She stopped, a little breathless, and looked at Roger. He was sitting very still, but she could see the muscles of his throat twisting as he swallowed and swallowed again, still in silence. When at last he answered her his voice came huskily from a dry throat.

"I never guessed at anything like this, Aunt Sarah. I never dreamed of anything so terrible. I don't suppose you want me to tell you how sorry I am ——" He broke off and then burst out: "It's hopelessly inadequate just to say I'm sorry; it means far more than that."

"Hush, my dear! You'll waken Mary if you talk so loudly. And listen, Roger, I don't want you to feel like this. I'm an old woman and I've not got much to live for, so it seems quite natural

and right to me. I don't want you to get worked up about it; I want you to help me."

"Of course I will," answered Roger. "You must tell me what to do. But you must realize, Aunt Sarah, that this is a bad knock to me; it's so awful to have you here like this, here with me now, and to know at the same time that you're so ill."

He was obviously unstrung, but Sarah Greene was too intent on her subject even to notice. Her soft untroubled voice went on:

"It isn't awful to know beforehand, Roger; it's splendid, because of Lynton. Lynton really is important, and I can make so many preparations now that I know. I'm leaving it to you, Roger; money, too, of course, but that doesn't matter. It's the house and land that matter. You'll live there, you and Mary; your children will be born there, and when you die your son will have it. Are you listening, Roger dear? Do you understand?"

Roger relaxed his attitude of strained attention; he had caught something of the urgency of her preoccupation.

"I love Lynton," he said, simply. "It will entirely change my life. You know I'm not very happy in my work and living like this, but I can

be absolutely happy at Lynton, and I'll try and have things exactly as you would like them. It's absurd to thank you, Aunt Sarah; Lynton isn't a Christmas present, but I promise you I'll keep it up to standard."

"It does reassure me to hear you say that," Mrs. Greene answered, happily. "I know you love it, Roger, and there will be enough money to keep it as it ought to be."

Her eyes were vague, her thoughts abstracted, as she brooded over the years during which her life had been bound up with the life of Lynton.

"You know I've lived there all my life," she went on, "except for the first three years after I married. There never was enough money when I was a girl; the house got shabbier and shabbier, and there were only two laborers for the gardens, and everything was overgrown; even the lawns had to be scythed and looked like rough meadows. And then I married Hugh and he loved it nearly as much as I did, and even during the three years when mamma was still alive he spent a little money here, and a little there, very secretly and carefully, so that she shouldn't guess."

"Where were you living then, Aunt Sarah?" interrupted Roger.

"We had taken a house not far from Lynton. You know it, surely; it's called Willowes, only about two miles the other side of Petworth. Of course, Hugh came up to town during the week; he was very busy, you know. Geoffrey had refused to go into his father's business, so Hugh stepped into old Mr. Greene's shoes when he died. I came up sometimes, but not very often. Then when mamma died we went to live at Lynton, of course, and Hugh gave me a free hand. I put the house right first; it was the easiest, but then it took a long time to work up the gardens, and the lawns didn't come right for years. And you see, the tenants hadn't had anything done for them for a long time, so I had to be very judicious. The farms needed new roofs and some wanted new outbuildings, and the fences and gates were in a shocking state, but we improved it all slowly."

Mrs. Greene fell silent, thinking gratefully of all that her husband's money had been able to do for the place she loved.

"And now, of course, it's perfect," said Roger, soberly.

She caught eagerly at the word:

"Yes, I think it is perfect, but you know it would

go downhill at once if it weren't looked after. And that's why I'm so glad to have told you all my affairs. You see, dear, now I can go over everything with you, and give you all sorts of details that it would take you some time to find out for yourself, and so there need be no hitch later on when you take over."

Both were conscious that this was a reminder of the grim fact underlying the whole conversation, but to Mrs. Greene it seemed unimportant, and Roger was enough in tune with her to be able to concentrate on the one lovely aspect of the situation.

"I'd like to go with you to Lynton," he suggested.

"That's exactly what I want. I feel I must get back there at once, dear. I can't stay on in town. But I don't want to hurt Mary's feelings, and I must come up again next week for Mrs. Rodney's party. What is the best thing to do?"

"Do you really want to go at once?"

"Yes, really at once. Tomorrow if possible—I suppose I mean today ——"

A sudden realization of the time swept over Mrs. Greene.

The stars had faded and a pale dawn was creeping up the sky.

"It's cold," she said, "and it's some absurd hour in the morning. We must both go to bed. I don't know what we've been thinking of. This is all most unusual."

Roger smiled and stood up.

"I'm just going," he said, "but first about plans. We'll tell Mary that you feel it's too long to stay in town, and that you're going home today and coming back next week. And I'll join you tomorrow, Saturday, and spend Sunday with you."

It was surprising that Roger should take the initiative to this extent. He seemed suddenly to have become more mature, more capable, and Sarah Greene found the effect very restful.

"Thank you, Roger dear, that will be the best possible plan," she said, enjoying to the full the rare sensation of being arranged for.

She stood up, shivering a little in the cold morning air.

"You've been the greatest comfort to me," she said, "and I don't want you to think of this talk as being at all sad. It isn't. Planning for the future is a very happy thing; and now I'm going to bed again."

Roger kissed her.

"Good night, my dear," he said. "Sleep well

till breakfast, and rely on me. I'll take care of Lynton for you."

V

On Saturday morning a dense pearl-colored mist rose about two feet above ground, so that, walking along her familiar paths, Sarah Greene experienced unfamiliar sensations. Trees and bushes seemed to balance lightly on the swimming vapor, the gentle slope up to the garden assumed a fiercer gradient, everything was wet to the touch, yet no rain fell.

At noon a watery sun gleamed fitfully through the stationary clouds, but at four o'clock, when Roger drove along the beech avenue, only occasional bare branches were dimly visible, and when the car turned the last corner he saw that the lovely sombre house was softly shrouded.

Mrs. Greene had spent the afternoon in a state of unreasonable disappointment. She knew that Roger had arrived at Lynton countless times in the full splendor of sunlight, but she had determined that this arrival, too, should have the benison of the sun. He was not coming this time only as Roger Dodds; he was coming as owner of Lynton who must also be lover of Lynton.

Proud and confident as she was of the irreproachable beauty of house and land, she had nevertheless set her heart on showing them off to their best advantage at this particular moment when Roger would be likely to see them from a new angle.

His first words dispelled her anxiety.

"Isn't this mist beautiful? I don't think I've ever seen the house look so lovely and mysterious."

"Does it really strike you like that? I've been feeling so cross with the weather all afternoon. I wanted sun for you, but it doesn't matter if you like this."

"I do. I think it's beautiful," repeated Roger, emphatically.

"Come and have tea now," said Mrs. Greene, "and just tell me when you have to go back to town, so that I can arrange everything to get the most value from your visit."

"I must go tomorrow evening about five, I'm afraid. There's a rotten slow train about then that'll do me quite well."

"Is Monday quite impossible?"

"I'm afraid it is, quite," Roger answered, definitely.

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Greene. "After

tea and this evening we'll devote to business. I'll get out the map of the estate and give you details about all the tenants and go over the books with you. That will leave us free really to enjoy tomorrow. I think it will be a lovely day—it often is after a mist like this—and we'll go for a long walk and have a late lunch."

"I'd like that immensely."

"We'll go down the grass walk to the lower fields where Lynton marches with Hurstfield, and then home through the woods. And sometime I want you to talk to Hamilton. He's an excellent man and he can help you a great deal. I'm not quite satisfied with Parks, the second gardener. We'll ask Hamilton what he thinks of him."

"I've been thinking a lot about Lynton yesterday and today," said Roger, shyly, "and realizing how much I like every detail. It's good the way the house stands four-square to the winds, and I like the Portland stone it's built of. Really, the exterior is a lovely combination of ornament and discretion. It's sound, don't you think?"

"That's exactly what your Uncle Hugh used to say," answered Mrs. Greene, slowly. "Yes, it's sound. Houses are beautifully permanent, aren't they? I like to think that stone lasts, just

as I like to remember that the beeches will be better for your son than they were for my grandfather. Lynton consolidates itself with every generation."

"It's a good point of view," said Roger, soberly. "You know I like stability and soundness. I saw so much chaos in the war that I had a violent reaction in favor of settled traditional things. In fact, I'm very conventional."

"You have to be conventional if you're going to be at all happy in the country," Mrs. Greene announced with decision. "I don't mean because of the people, though there's that too, of course. They are much more conventional than in town, and they'd be disappointed and puzzled if one didn't do certain conventional things. But I was thinking of nature really. You'll find that the land and the woods and the gardens all proceed along the most orderly and conventional lines. Really, Roger, there are no surprises except that every year I find the first tulips more lovely than I had remembered. But nothing bizarre ever happens. Things either go smoothly and the crops are good and the flowers do well, or else it's warm too early and we get frost in April and everything is nipped, but either way it goes by rote."

"Every word you say makes me like it all the

more." Roger's face was serious. "You see, I'm rather like that myself—I'm dull; I've no surprises."

Mrs. Greene attacked him hotly in his own defense.

"Really, Roger, what nonsense you talk! It's ridiculous to say you're dull. I don't find you so at all, and you very often surprise me. I don't approve of you underrating yourself like that."

Roger laughed.

"I don't mean to underrate myself, but sometimes I feel I'm a dull dog."

"You never need feel that when you're with me, Roger," said Mrs. Greene, struggling to express an emotional fact in an unemotional manner. "You know how fond I am of you, my dear boy, and proud of you, too. You touched me very much by what you said at dinner the other night about our friendship. I know it was quite true and genuine, and the more I think of it the more I am glad to think of you and Mary living here."

She stood up abruptly.

"Come now, let's go and get out the books. I really have a great deal to tell you."

Late that night Sarah Greene drew back the curtains of her bedroom and looked out over the wide lawns to the formally cut box hedge beyond,

and to the meadows beyond that, sloping steeply up to the solitary woods.

A breeze had sprung up, dispelling the mist, the heaped-up clouds were hurrying across the dark sky, and the young clear moon was unrimmed.

"Tomorrow will be a wild and lovely day," she said, softly, "Lynton will look its best for Roger."

Confident and contented, she got into bed and slept till morning, when she wakened to just such a day as she had foretold. White clouds were still hurrying across the sky, but in between it was a deep and steady blue. Leaves were flying over the lawn, a branch had been blown off the lime tree near her window and lay untidily on the path below. Even the solid hedge yielded a little this way and that to the contrary wind.

It was a sparkling and exhilarating morning. Sarah Greene and Roger Dodds shared in its exhilaration as they started out before eleven. They had made no professions of pleasure beyond Roger's casual comment, "A lovely day, isn't it?" as he came in a little late and sat down to breakfast. But each was conscious of the other's happiness, and at times when Mrs. Greene caught Roger's eye, or saw him lift his head, suddenly

intent, as a fiercer gust battered on the windows, she felt that they were conspirators who shared a secret too exquisite to be alluded to.

This feeling persisted. Never before had Roger seemed so responsive. As they walked at a good pace down the grass path his hidden excitement communicated itself to her, and her delight was obvious to him.

I've never felt like this with anyone but Hugh, she thought. It's like a discovery. I've never really known Roger before, and now, just when Lynton and I need him, he suddenly unfolds. It's too surprising.

A small toad hopped clumsily across their path; his legs as he took off for each leap seemed incredibly long, and his protruding eyes were startled. They stopped to watch him, and laughed.

Roger, too, was conscious that a marked change had taken place in their relationship: it was more alive, and at the same time more comfortable. It struck neither of them as strange that this should be so; everything seemed perfectly natural to the ill-assorted pair; the small woman of seventy, pinched, sallow, dressed in nondescript clothes, but walking bravely in her sensible shoes, and the tall

untidy young man, with his inexpressive body and face.

Mrs. Greene did not attempt to explain to herself this forward move in their intimacy. She accepted it as a belated discovery of Roger's real quality. But as they left the grass walk and trudged through the busy, rustling woods, still not talking, Roger hit on a solution that satisfied him.

It's the link of succession, he decided; there must be a link of either love or hate between a person who is going to hand over the thing he values most highly to some one who values it, too. And Aunt Sarah has neither hate nor resentment for me, so that this particular situation which might be painful is, oddly enough, quite easy.

"What are you thinking, Roger?" asked Mrs. Greene, suddenly. He turned his head to smile down at her.

"I was thinking how very comfortable we were," he answered, simply.

"I thought that a few minutes ago. I'm very comfortable altogether, Roger. Mary said to me the other day that she thought I had no worries, and really, you know, it's perfectly true."

"How big, exactly, is the estate?" asked Roger, inconsequently.

"Two thousand five hundred and thirty-four acres," Mrs. Greene answered, precisely.

"That ought to provide you with a worry or two," suggested Roger.

"No, it doesn't, I have occasional anxieties, but no real worries."

They walked on in silence till Roger said, abruptly, "I hate London."

"Of course you do; everybody does, really," answered Mrs. Greene, inattentively.

Roger laughed and took her arm.

"No, they don't," he said. "That's nonsense. They like it, mostly. They feel safe living in a sort of rabbit warren. They'd be terrified if you set them down in a little cottage in an open space."

"I suppose that's true," answered Mrs. Greene, "but it seems incredible to me. Aren't the woods lovely, Roger?"

"They're perfectly lovely. You know I feel I ought to be asking you all sorts of things, but instead I'm just enjoying myself."

"So am I. I'm very fond of this path; I often come down it."

No faintest tinge of sadness broke their even happiness, though both were thinking of the many hundreds of times that Mrs. Greene had walked

along the grass path, over the fields and through the woods, and of the very few more that would be added to the total.

"It's quite dense here, isn't it?" said Mrs. Greene, "and yet you know in a minute we'll be in the meadow with the house in front of us."

"I know; it always comes on you suddenly."

As Roger spoke, a turn in the path brought them out of the wood in full view of the house.

The sun streaming over Lynton turned its austere gray façade to a mottled richness, and the leaves of the Virginia creeper that was only allowed to climb at the southeast corner licked at the stone like little fiery tongues. The tall chimneys, the tall narrow windows, gave to the sober beauty of the house an airy effect of grace and lightness that did not mar its steadfast quality. Lynton was undoubtedly sound.

Mrs. Greene and Roger had stopped at the edge of the wood. For a moment the woman who was about to leave Lynton, and the man who was about to enter it, stood together on a little hill and gazed greedily at it over the intervening box hedge. Then they walked on, through an opening in the hedge, over the lawn, and in at a side door.

"I want to find Hamilton this afternoon," said Mrs. Greene after lunch. "He'll be in one of two

places. He always is, on Sunday afternoons, either in the wall-garden or in the peach-house."

"Doesn't he ever take a day off?"

"No, not really. Mrs. Hamilton is very bad-tempered—gardeners' wives are always shrews, you'll find—and he never stays indoors if he can help it."

"I wonder if they're shrews because their husbands are so placid, or if the husbands have to be placid because the wives are shrews," mused Roger.

"I can tell you." Mrs. Greene spoke decisively. "All good gardeners have easy-going temperaments, so they have a fatal attraction for domineering women."

"I see. Hamilton is a good man isn't he?"

"Excellent; patient and enterprising, the two best qualities in a gardener. If you're not tired we'll go up to the garden now and look for him."

"Surely it's you who should be tired after such a long walk?"

"Oh no! I'm in quite good training for walking," answered Mrs. Greene, serenely.

Hamilton was discovered in the garden, leaning with folded arms over the back of a seat, looking gloomily at the bare rose-bushes.

"Good afternoon, ma'am! Good afternoon, sir!" he said, straightening up as Mrs. Greene and Roger approached. "This is a real untidy wind."

He frowned disapprovingly and relapsed again into brooding silence. Roger, looking at the melancholy face above the white shirt with its dotted blue stripe and stiff white collar, wondered if Mrs. Hamilton's tongue was the cause of so much sorrow, or if pessimism as well as placidity was inherent in the tribe of gardeners.

"I wanted to have a chat with you about Parks," Mrs. Greene was saying. "Do you feel quite satisfied with him, Hamilton?"

"He does his work well and thoroughly," answered Hamilton, cautiously.

"But apart from that?" questioned Mrs. Greene.

Hamilton took off his cap and gently scratched his head before replying. Presently he replaced the cap and pronounced, heavily,

"The flowers don't like him, ma'am."

"That's what I was afraid of," said Mrs. Greene. "I don't think they grow for him."

Roger felt amazed. I have an awful lot to learn, he thought, I never realized that flowers only grew for people they liked. I expect Hamilton will heartily despise me. On an impulse of propitiation he ventured to remark:

"Surely it's very surprising that flowers should grow for one person and not another in the same garden under the same conditions."

Hamilton smiled pityingly and addressed Mrs. Greene.

"It's well seen that Mr. Dodds is not a countryman," he said; then turning to Roger he added: "Plants are like children, sir; they need handling. Ignorant persons or persons who don't care enough about them can't handle them proper."

Roger was crushed, and at the same time stimulated at the thought of what lay before him. The immediate future was depressing. He visualized the grimy, badly-lit, third-class carriage, the inexplicable delays characteristic of Sunday trains, the depressing arrival at Victoria. But soon there would be no Sunday journeys; he would come to Lynton to stay.

A poignant sorrow filled him at the thought that Aunt Sarah would not be there to enjoy it with him; but her calmness, her air of acceptance, had been infectious. Roger felt as she did, that regrets would be out of place, that the rounding-off of her life, so nearly complete, was merely an incident in the continuity of Lynton.

She was still talking about Parks and his successor.

"We'll tell him to look around, then, for a month or two; there's no immediate hurry, though I'd like it settled soon. And in the meantime I'll ask Lady Langton about that man of hers who's leaving her."

"Parks'll be sorry to leave," said Hamilton, slowly. "People get attached to Lynton. There's something about the place."

"There is," answered Mrs. Greene; "there certainly is. Well, we must get back to the house now. Mr. Dodds is going up to town this evening."

"That's a short visit this time, sir," said Hamilton. "But then, London people move about more quickly than what we do."

"I don't want to go," said Roger, anxious to make it clear that not restlessness but sheer necessity drove him back to London. "I'd much rather stay on here, but I have to get back to work."

Hamilton became a little more cordial.

"Well, good-by, sir," he said. "We'll hope to see you down again soon." And Roger felt childishly elated at having wiped out the bad impression made by his first comment.

"He crushed me utterly, Aunt Sarah," he said as soon as they were out of earshot.

Mrs. Greene laughed.

"My dear Roger, he's always like that; it's only his gloomy way of speaking. But I think he likes you; he often asks after you."

"I like him," said Roger, "but he alarms me."

"He won't when you know him better; he's really the mildest creature on the place. Now we must hurry back. I want you to have a cup of tea before you go."

"You'll come to us on Thursday, then?" asked Roger as the car drove up to take him to the station.

"Yes, I'd like to do that, but I'll come back here on Saturday, after Edith's party, and you and Mary will come soon for a long visit, won't you?"

"We'd like to," answered Roger, soberly. "It would be good for Mary to be in the country just now, and I'd like to be with you."

"I know that, my dear boy"—Sarah Greene lifted her face to be kissed—"and I've had a delightful twenty-four hours with you."

She came to the door with him and stood at the top of the steps as he got into the car, one hand resting lightly on the stone balustrade.

At the turn of the drive Roger looked back.

The light was failing and rooks were flying over the chimneys to reach home before dusk fell.

Sarah Greene had come down the steps and was standing looking up at them with her head thrown back as they flew over her roof. She stood quite motionless and absorbed, and did not notice when the car turned the corner and was lost to sight.

CHAPTER III

Mrs. Rodney Greene

I

THE birth, growth, and development of Edith Beckett were in the nature of a prolonged prelude to the life of Edith Greene.

She was brought up with but one ideal—to be a good wife and mother, and to set about being the first, at least, at as early an age as possible. This concentration on a single aim amply repaid itself.

When Edith married in 1900 she was equipped with a complete knowledge of the usual faults of the young married man, the dangerous tendencies which must be nipped in the bud by his loving and protective wife, and the special points which she must remember to keep always in mind when building up out of the faulty material to hand a perfect specimen of the genus 'husband.'

She realized beforehand that even on the honeymoon a young wife could not afford to be con-

tented with any lapse from these high standards which it was her duty to impose upon the man whom she had honored with her hand; one must begin as one meant to go on.

In this Spartan mood Edith Beckett steeled herself to marry Rodney Greene, and it is fair to say that never once did she fall into the pitiful weakness of condoning in silence any breach on Rodney's part of manners, morals, or good behavior.

II

Their wedding was a successful one. Edith's undeniable good looks showed to advantage in their conventional setting of chilly white satin, stiffly wired orange blossom, and floating veils.

It was generally understood that the young couple intended to spend their honeymoon on the Continent, staying the first night at Dover, but a proper atmosphere of mystification hid their actual destination.

After the last guest had departed, Mrs. Beckett, subsiding into the nearest chair, indulged in a few tears of mixed emotion and fatigue.

"Wasn't the dear child looking lovely?" she

said. "I thought the way she looked up at Rodney when he put on the ring was just beautiful. I told her to be sure and look up just then, so that everyone could see her profile, and even in the midst of all the excitement she didn't forget."

Mrs. Beckett sighed contentedly.

"Very nice indeed," answered Mr. Beckett. "In fact, it all went very well. Plenty of champagne, wasn't there? I ordered an extra six dozen, to be on the safe side."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Beckett, inconsequently. "Our little Edith's gone now. They must be in the train. I just hope Rodney will be good enough to her and take care of her."

A glimpse into the carriage of the train, rushing through the flat fields of Kent, would have reassured Mrs. Beckett.

Edith was leaning back restfully, very calm, very pretty, while Rodney leaned forward from the seat opposite and kissed her hand devotedly in the intervals of conversation.

"I really think it was a very pretty wedding." She spoke with a satisfied intonation. "Everyone admired my dress and thought my spray of flowers much more original than a round bouquet."

"You were wonderful, my darling. When I

put the ring on and you looked up at me, my heart missed a beat."

"Dear Rodney," said Edith, affectionately. But suddenly her face stiffened. Rodney had taken out his cigarette case and was actually lighting a cigarette.

"Surely you aren't going to smoke now, Rodney!" she rebuked him.

"Would you rather I didn't?"

"Yes, much rather. I don't think this is a time for smoking."

Rodney threw away the cigarette.

"Oh, well," he said, good-naturedly, "I expect I can manage to wait till we get to Dover."

"You're surely not dependent on a trivial thing like a cigarette are you?" asked Edith, in a slightly shocked voice.

"Of course I am dreadfully dependent on all sorts of trivial things—cigarettes and you and good cooking and a glass of port every night."

He smiled at her, but her answering smile was a little formal.

"Of course I know you're only teasing, Rodney, but still there is a certain amount of truth in what you say. I've noticed you are apt to rely too much on things like smoking and port and so on,

and I've always been brought up to believe that as soon as you feel yourself becoming a slave to a habit you should drop it at once."

Rodney looked blank for a moment.

"Don't let's bother about that now," he said. "Bad habits are very pleasant, after all, and you don't want to change me the minute you've married me, do you?"

He spoke lightly, but Edith answered in a serious vein.

"Not all at once, of course, dear, but I do hope I shall be able to influence you a great deal."

Rodney missed the austere note in her voice, and laughed.

"Of course you will," he said, enthusiastically. "You shall influence me as much as you like, Mrs. Greene. I love you immensely and you shall do just what you please."

"No, but seriously, Rodney," persisted Edith. "It isn't a case of doing what I please; we must try to improve each other. A marriage where both people don't improve is a failure."

"Darling, you're quoting your mother, and, anyhow, it's nonsense," said Rodney. "Besides, I want to kiss you."

The rest of the journey was tranquil, and in

the bustle of sorting out their luggage at the Marine Station, Rodney forgot to light a cigarette. It was with a genuine sigh of relief that he followed Edith into their bedroom at the hotel, strode over to the window, drew back the curtains to look out over the dark harbor, and fumbled again for his cigarette case. Edith noticed the gesture. She came and stood beside him and gently took the case out of his hand.

"Darling Rodney," she said, "I know you like me always to say what I think, even if it's a little difficult."

She stopped, and Rodney flung an arm round her and said, encouragingly:

"What is it, dear?"

"I must say, Rodney, that it would seem to me quite wrong and not respectful for you to smoke in my bedroom."

"But, hang it, darling, it's my bedroom too!" Rodney expostulated.

Edith blushed deeply.

"Yes, of course," she murmured. "Yes, in a way it is, but still it wouldn't be quite nice for you to smoke in it."

Her confusion was attractive. Rodney felt an ecstatic thrill at the thought that this was the first

time that they had shared a bedroom together, and he held her to him and kissed her passionately.

But all Edith's rebukes did not lead to kissing. When they returned from their honeymoon Rodney found himself enmeshed in a net of feminine dislikes, restrictions, and vetoes.

The details of Edith's campaign for mutual improvement outlined themselves one by one; but it struck Rodney as a little hard that on his side the improvement was to be carried out by definite acts of self-denial, by giving up old habits and forming new ones, whereas on Edith's side, apparently, the foundation was perfectly sound, and all that was necessary was to cultivate virtues already in existence.

"You know, Edwin," he said to his brother one evening, a few months after his marriage and a few months before Edwin's, "there's a hell of a lot of difference between being a bachelor and a married man. I never realized how much I'd have to change. I used to think I was pretty harmless, but according to Edith I'm a mass of poisonous habits. Not that she isn't a wonderful woman," he added, loyally, "clever and capable and all that. But she certainly has got a bee in her bonnet about drink and smoking and language."

"Women are like that," said Edwin, gloomily. "You know it's funny how helpless and bullied Dora used to be, with old Mrs. Pilkington giving her no end of a bad time, but now they are running about together as thick as thieves, choosing the furniture, chosen the house, and if I happen to suggest anything, you may be sure it doesn't fit in with their scheme."

"That's just it. They've always got a scheme. Now Edith's scheme is that I should gradually be weaned away from drink. You know how little I drink, Edwin, less than most of the men I know, but she thinks it's a habit and I'm a slave to it or something like that, and you know I believe she'd put one of those stinking pills they're always advertising, into my coffee, if she thought it would make me give up port."

Edwin laughed morosely.

"I can just see her dropping it in," he said. "All for your own good, you know, and it pains her more than you." His face grew serious, and he added, rather diffidently: "I say, Rodney, I haven't had an awful lot of experience, you know; you might just tell me, does Edith cry a lot?"

"Cry?" repeated Rodney, looking startled. "Oh, cry! No, she doesn't. Why? Does Dora?"

"Well, yes, she does, rather a lot. She bursts into tears pretty easily and takes offense, but then, of course, she's always had such a rotten time."

"Edith takes offense a good deal, but she doesn't cry. It makes her sort of cold and dignified. In fact, I think she feels she's getting on with her self-improvement campaign when she just reasons gently with me instead of getting angry."

Rodney suddenly felt guilty of disloyalty to his good-looking and adequate wife. He adopted the hearty tone of the happily married man and clapped his brother on the shoulder.

"Edith's all right," he said, "and you'll find Dora'll be all right too. Don't worry, Edwin, things settle themselves nicely."

That same evening he took a less optimistic view. He was undressing slowly, sitting in his shirt, with one shoe in hand, luxuriously enjoying a cigarette, when Edith came into his dressing-room.

"May I come in, darling?" she asked, shutting the door behind her without waiting for permission. Rodney looked with pleasure at the two long dark plaits falling over her pink dressing-gown, and at the white swansdown lying softly at the base of her white throat.

"Do," he answered, heartily. "Do come and sit down and talk to me. I know I'm being slow." Edith bent to kiss him, but drew back with a look of disgust.

"Oh, Rodney," she said, gently, "smoking again! I thought we had arranged that all the upper part of the house was to be kept free from the dirt and smell of your cigarettes."

"We never arranged anything of the sort. I don't bring the dirt and smell, as you call it, into your bedroom or the drawing-room, but, damn it, I don't see why I shouldn't occasionally smoke a cigarette in my own dressing-room!"

"Just as you please, of course," said Edith, turning away.

"Don't go like that," urged Rodney, putting out the offending cigarette. "Surely it isn't worth quarreling about."

"It isn't only that, Rodney," said Edith, gravely. "It's much more serious and fundamental than that. Your language really horrifies me; it's so terribly coarse."

Rodney was aghast.

"Coarse?" he repeated. "How do you mean, coarse?"

"Why, there you are, darling," said Edith,

more kindly. "You see you don't even know you've just sworn at me."

"I never meant to swear at you, Edith. I'm sorry if I did. But look here, dear, let's just talk out once and for all this matter of not smoking upstairs. It really is nonsense that I shouldn't smoke in my own dressing-room."

Edith smiled tenderly on him and laid her hand over his mouth.

"Don't say any more," she urged. "I don't want you to have anything to be sorry for tonight, and I know that what I have to tell you will make you look at things from my point of view. Listen, dear; I came to tell you some wonderful news. I don't know whether you've looked ahead or not, and thought about all the responsibility of having a child, but you'll have to now, darling; you're going to be a father."

Her voice dropped to a reverent whisper as she added, "It's almost too marvelous to be true, isn't it, Rodney?"

Rodney's feelings were mixed. His genuine pleasure at the thought of having a child was impaired by Edith's manner of imparting the news to him. He perceived already that the child would be used as a goad to further Edith's schemes

for a less easy-going, more disciplined, habit of life.

"I'm very glad," he said, heavily. "Dear Edith." But even as he stood up on one stockinged foot to kiss her, he thought gloomily that it was a little hard on him that an extraneous circumstance should step in and win Edith's battle for her.

"You're really pleased, aren't you?" she asked, and an unusual note of wistfulness in her voice banished his resentment.

"Of course I am, my darling," he said, warmly. "I'm delighted. I'll toe the line all right from now onwards. You won't catch me smoking up here again, I promise you."

Edith unbent completely. The opposition had wilted, she could afford to be generous.

"Dearest Rodney," she said, affectionately, "you know how much I care for you. I only speak about these depressing things because I feel I ought to. And now I must go to bed."

She disengaged herself gently from his arms and moved towards the door.

"You'll come at once, won't you?" she said. "I do get so tired of waiting while you loiter over your undressing. Don't be long, dear."

She shut the door quietly, and Rodney hurried

out of his clothes into pajamas, determined not to risk another reproach merely for the pleasure of ending the day in that atmosphere of contented leisure which he found so congenial.

III

It was three years before Rodney fully appreciated the fact that Providence would always win Edith's battles for her, and would, moreover, give such a twist to her victory that the loser was often obliged to admit that he had been wrong.

One year after their marriage, when their son Geoffrey was a few weeks old, Rodney was still fighting for supremacy in their common life.

Edith was slow in recovering her strength; she was at the stage of having breakfast in bed and a long rest in the afternoon, and the doctor advised her to go with the baby for a change of air. At this juncture a letter arrived from Rodney's mother inviting her daughter-in-law and her new grandson for a long visit as soon as they were well enough to face the journey.

Rodney went cheerfully up to his wife's bedroom, carrying the letter, and sat down on the edge of her bed.

"Here's a letter from mother," he said. "She

wants you and the boy to go and stay for as long as you can, just as soon as you are able. Isn't that nice and convenient?"

"Well I don't quite know," answered Edith, slowly. "I wonder why she didn't write directly to me."

"Oh, no special reason. I suppose she just happened to be writing to me, so she asked me to send you down to her for a bit, and really it fits in very well. The doctor seems to want you to go to the country for a week or two."

"Oh, I see!" said Edith. "It's quite a casual invitation, is it?"

"Well, I don't quite know what you mean by casual. You know mother is awfully keen to see the baby and you know she hasn't been well enough to come to town, so in the circumstances it seems to me very natural. Shall I write for you and say you'll be delighted to go next week?"

"No, don't do that, dear," said Edith, firmly. "I'm not quite sure that it would be the wisest thing to do. As you say, your Mother hasn't been well, and I'm not very strong yet, so it would really be rather a houseful of invalids."

"I don't think you need worry about that. Mother's perfectly all right now. It was only a

sort of serious chill, I believe, and I know she wants to see the little chap."

"Yes, of course she does." Edith's voice was rather noticeably patient. "But I'm really not convinced that it would be a good thing to go there now."

"Nonsense, Edith!" said Rodney. "I don't know what all this fuss is about. Of course it's the obvious thing to do, but we won't discuss it now. There's no need to write to mother at once."

"Very well, Rodney dear," said Edith, coldly and submissively, and the subject was temporarily closed.

That evening Edith developed, along with a severe headache, a slight rise in temperature.

"I think I'd like to ring up the doctor, Mrs. Greene, if you don't mind," said the monthly nurse. "Of course baby is three weeks old and Mrs. Greene is really nearly well again, but still I don't like her temperature going up."

"Please do ring him up, Nurse," urged Rodney. "It's worrying. I can't think why she should get a feverish headache like this."

"I don't quite understand it, either," admitted the nurse. "Mrs. Greene has been looking worried and not herself all day, but I know of nothing to account for it."

Rodney's heart sank. He was oppressed by grim forebodings, and it was no surprise to him when the doctor came downstairs after examining Edith and said to him:

"Well, there's nothing much wrong, Mr. Greene—only a nervous headache and a little fever—but I'm afraid you'll have to give up this plan of yours that Mrs. Greene is worrying herself into fits about."

"What plan?" asked Rodney, dully.

"I understand from Mrs. Greene that you wanted to rush her down to the country to show the baby to its grandmother."

"That wasn't quite the idea," explained Rodney. "I understood, on the other hand, that you wanted my wife to have a change of air, and my mother very kindly asked her to go down to their place for a bit."

"Oh yes, I see. But I'm afraid it won't quite do. Mrs. Greene has worked herself into a state of nervous excitement about it. But I shouldn't worry; there's very often a feeling of strain between a young woman and her mother-in-law that works itself out in time, and of course Mrs. Greene is sensitive and highly strung."

"Highly strung?" queried Rodney. "Edith,

you mean? But she's the calmest, most determined person I've ever seen."

The doctor was putting on his gloves.

"Quite so," he agreed. "A splendid patient, lots of self-control, but very sensitive none the less, and I think you'll be well advised to give way to her over this. Good night, Mr. Greene."

He hurried out, and Rodney sat down to write to his mother.

While Edith was at Bognor with the nurse and baby, Mrs. Greene had a second and more serious attack of pain which proved to be not a chill, but appendicitis, necessitating an immediate operation. Edith's first letter to her husband was full of sympathy for his anxiety; her second expressed pleasure at her mother-in-law's recovery; but on her return she could not refrain from saying: "And wasn't it a blessing, darling, that you finally abandoned your absurd plan of sending us to your mother for a rest?"

To which Rodney could only answer, lamely: "Yes, as things turned out I suppose it was a good thing you didn't go."

Two years after their marriage he no longer attempted to impose his wishes on Edith, but he still fought to protect his own liberty of action. In the house, in all matters pertaining to it, and

in the conduct of their joint life, he deferred to her completely. He still, however, insisted on an annual fishing holiday without her; he frequented his club in spite of her disapproval; and he was loyal to several friendships which she deplored.

It was over one of these that Providence again played a hand for Edith.

Her opening gambit was tentative. Rodney came home one evening with a healthy color in his cheeks.

"There's spring in the air tonight," he said. "I walked all the way home, and it was fine. By Jove! I'll soon have to begin looking out my rods if I'm going to get ready for Easter."

"You're not going with Jim Turner again this year, are you?" asked Edith, gravely.

"Well, I haven't said anything to him lately; I haven't seen him in the club, as a matter of fact; but of course it's an understood thing between us that if we can get away, we go off together in April for a week or so."

"I don't think he can possibly expect your company this year," said Edith, firmly.

Rodney looked at her cautiously.

"I don't know why you should say that," he said. "Of course Jim will be expecting me to join up with him."

Edith plunged into her subject.

"Have you considered at all that if you go away with him it will look as if you approved of his conduct these last few months?"

"I don't know what you mean," mumbled Rodney. "I've known old Jim for years, and he's all right."

"But you must know that he has been making his wife very unhappy all this winter."

"I know she makes him pretty unhappy; she's a hard-mouthed, bitter-looking creature."

Edith's color heightened.

"Really, Rodney," she said, "you force me to be indelicate and to speak plainly. Do you or do you not know that Jim Turner has been behaving disgracefully with an actress?"

Rodney looked uncomfortable.

"I don't want to know anything about his private affairs," he said. "Jim's a jolly good sort, anyhow, and what's more I'd like to know how you got hold of all this stuff about him and his actress."

"It's enough that I do know," said Edith, seriously. "Women are loyal to one another, Rodney. I never can understand why people say we have no sense of honor. It's really most unfair.

Women tell one another everything and help one another whenever they can."

"Well, I hope to Heaven nobody will go bleating to Mrs. Turner about Jenny Eaves, that's all," said Rodney. "Jim's got enough to put up with already, God knows."

Edith was quick to perceive his admission, but she let the subject drop for the moment. A few days later, having cogitated the matter from various angles, she asked Mrs. Turner to tea, and added, mysteriously to her note of invitation; "I'm anxious to have a little private talk with you. There is something I feel you ought to know, and though it is a difficult topic for me to touch on, I feel I must make the effort to do so."

In writing this note Edith was actuated by perfectly pure motives. Her own words as to the honorableness of her sex had resounded pleasantly in her ears. Thinking the matter over afterwards, it seemed to her no less than her duty, if rumors were gathering unpleasantly round Jim Turner's name, to repeat them to his wife, in order that Mrs. Turner might scotch them by some decisive action.

Only one form of decisive action occurred to Edith. She assumed that Mrs. Turner would behave as she, Edith Greene, would behave in a

similar predicament—though such a thing was almost unimaginable. She would deal summarily with her husband, pointing out where his duty lay and emphasizing the necessity for a clean break from temptation in the form of the actress, and she would then arrange to be seen about on good terms with her husband, in public and at the houses of their various friends. The whole thing would then blow over, and Edith Greene decided that in that case Rodney would not be condoning a moral wrong by going for his usual holiday with Jim Turner.

Mrs. Turner came to tea. She chatted pleasantly till she had drunk a cup of tea and eaten a sandwich, and then, laying down her cup, she came straight to the point.

"I think you wanted to speak to me about something," she said, quietly.

"I do, Mrs. Turner," answered Edith. "It is extremely awkward for me to do so. I don't know you very well, but it seemed to me that even as an acquaintance I owed it to you to repeat to your face what people are saying behind your back."

Mrs. Turner stiffened.

"Indeed!" she said. "And what are people saying behind my back?"

Edith answered, courageously.

"There is a great deal of gossip centering round your husband's name," she said. "You probably know nothing about it; the wife is often the last person to hear of these things. People suspect him of having an affair with an actress; in fact, it is more than a suspicion. He has been seen about everywhere with this Miss Eaves, and my husband says he never even sees him at lunch at the club nowadays."

Mrs. Turner rose. She was pale and her mouth was drawn into a thin line.

"I had no idea of this," she said. "Thank you, Mrs. Greene, for telling me so much. I shall find out the truth and take steps about it at once. Believe me, I am grateful to you."

"I'm so glad you take it like that," said Edith, cordially. "It was a very painful thing to speak about, but I felt it was the best thing to do, so I just took my courage in both hands."

Mrs. Turner ceremoniously took her leave, and Edith was conscious of the pleasant feeling of having carried out well an unpleasant duty; but the steps taken by Mrs. Turner proved not to be what she had so confidently anticipated.

She heard the results of her well-meant inter-

ference a week later. Rodney came home looking depressed, and sat in a glum silence all evening.

"What's wrong, Rodney?" asked Edith, finally.

"Well, I saw Jim at the club today at lunch, and there's been a hellish bust up. It seems some woman went and told Mrs. Turner about that affair of his, and she went poking about a bit and found it had been pretty serious and so on, and now it's all up. She's left the house, and she's been to her solicitors and is going to divorce him. It's a sickening business. Jim is very cut up about it all."

Rodney smiled bleakly. "Anyhow, you'll be pleased," he said. "It puts the lid on our holiday all right. I don't think I'll go myself now."

Edith's eyes had widened with dismay at his first words, and as he went on her breathing grew hurried and her lips parted in an expression of annoyance and perturbation. She was sincerely upset.

"My dear Rodney," she said, "I'm very sorry indeed about this, especially as I am the woman you refer to who spoke to Mrs. Turner."

"By God! Edith," said Rodney angrily, "what the devil did you do that for? You've made a frightful mess of things."

"Do be calm, Rodney," urged Edith, her self-

possession returning as she prepared to justify herself. "I had no option but to speak to Mrs. Turner. After all I had heard, it would have been utterly base to have let things slide when a word might have helped to mend them."

"I simply don't understand you, Edith; you're talking like an imbecile. You've never liked Jim Turner, you didn't want me to go away with him, and now that you've succeeded in putting a spoke in his wheel, you say it would have been utterly base to do anything else. You're beyond my understanding."

Edith stood up indignantly.

"You entirely misjudge me," she said. "I acted from the purest motives in doing this very unpleasant thing, and indeed, Rodney, you ought to know me well enough to realize that a petty personal consideration like your going away with Mr. Turner against my wishes would never have influenced me either way."

Rodney looked at her; she returned his gaze steadily, and he knew that she was convinced of her own sincerity.

"I'm sorry," he said, heavily, "I think you were terribly wrong in what you did, but I know you meant well."

"Thank you, Rodney," she answered. "It's

generous of you to admit that at least, and I should like to say that I'm sorry things have turned out as they have. But you know, dear, I can't help feeling that, since Mr. Turner's affair had apparently gone to such a shocking length, it is perhaps only right that it should be exposed."

Rodney made no answer; he only shrugged his shoulders and sat staring in front of him, his drooping attitude indicating acute mental depression.

Edith drew up a low chair, sat down beside him, captured one of his hands, and patted it gently.

"Don't worry, my dear," she said. "I have a delightful plan. Instead of going off by yourself, why not take me with you this year. I can leave Geoffrey with Nurse, and we would thoroughly enjoy a few days together, just you and I."

Her voice was persuasive, her expression appealing, and the flickering fire lit up her rich coloring and wide dark eyes. Looking at her clear dark beauty, Rodney felt that he could certainly enjoy a holiday with her, and he pushed away the thought of Jim's betrayal as he put his arms round her and said, enthusiastically: "I'd like it immensely, darling. We'll go where you like and when you like."

Three years after their marriage he was sur-

prised to find how easy it was to let Edith arrange their life and dispose of his leisure as she pleased. Her looks were a constant delight to him, her manner in general was restful, and their relationship was smooth and effortless so long as he never opposed her. On the rare occasions when he did, he always half expected some unforeseen hazard to intervene on Edith's behalf; he had ceased to expect a fair deal.

When in 1904 she expressed a desire to move to a larger house he demurred on the grounds of expense and ostentation.

"I think we owe it to ourselves to have a better setting now," said Edith, "and really, dear, you must acknowledge that we can easily afford it."

"Well, I don't know about that. Business isn't bad, of course, but a move is an expensive thing. I'd rather leave it for a year or two."

"Now, darling, don't be difficult about it," said Edith, playfully. "I'm quite determined to take the house in Sussex Square; it's just right in every way."

"So you've even found the house we're to go to, have you?" asked Rodney, a little bitterly.

Edith blushed. "I suppose it is rather tiresome of me to have chosen it myself, but I do like to

save you worry, dear, and, after all, the house is my province and the business yours."

She smiled coaxingly, but Rodney shook his head.

"No, Edith," he said. "I'm sorry, but I won't do it this year. Our income doesn't justify it, and we'll do very well as we are."

"Of course we will if you have quite decided against a move. You're sure you wouldn't just like to look at the Sussex Square house?"

"I'm quite sure," said Rodney, emphatically, and Edith laughed good-humoredly and only answered, "Well that settles it, of course."

But a few weeks later she came into his dressing-room one night and settled herself comfortably in an armchair.

"Rodney dear," she began, "I have something to tell you. We're going to have another child, and I think that really does mean we must move to the bigger house we were talking of the other day."

Rodney felt a definite sensation of shock as if some familiar string had been twanged in his brain. As he congratulated Edith and expressed his own gratification his thoughts were racing madly, but it was not till Edith left the room, looking back from the door to say with a plaintive accent, "Do

hurry up, darling," that he remembered the incident of three years ago.

It was difficult to imagine that there had ever been a time when he had smoked upstairs, but for a moment the parallel stood out sharply; both occasions had been used by Edith to gain some small point and to establish her ascendancy over him. As the recollection faded into dimness he smiled contentedly. Edith had consolidated her position as good wife and good mother, the naturally dominant factor in the home.

IV

The portrait entitled, "Mrs. Rodney Greene with Geoffrey, Lavinia, and Hugh," exhibited in the Academy of 1910, was much admired by the public, and favorably commented on by the press. Edith herself, looking at it hung in her own dining-room after it had been returned from Burlington House, felt her eyelids prick with sudden tears at the revelation of her own triumphant motherhood.

She had been painted in a wine-red gown, sitting in a high-backed chair with her face turned a little sideways and downwards, brooding tenderly over Lavinia and Hugh, who stood at her

left knee, while her right arm was thrown affectionately round Geoffrey's shoulders, as if to compensate for the fact that she had turned away from where he stood on the right.

All three children were in white: Geoffrey and Hugh in sailor suits, Lavinia in a softly hanging silk dress. All three were upright and dark, with clear soft color in their cheeks, but whereas both the boys were gazing out of the canvas with serious, dreaming faces, Lavinia had looked up at her mother, and her lips were parted in a smile over her small first teeth.

This happy, unstudied little pose was the starting-point of all Edith's comments on the portrait, until the day when Mrs. Hugh Greene, her husband's aunt, came to tea and asked to have it shown to her.

"I went only once to the Academy this summer," she explained, "and though, of course, I saw the portrait and admired it very much, I should certainly like to see it again."

"It looks very nice in the dining-room," Edith answered as they went downstairs. "In fact, we are extremely pleased with it, though I think perhaps it flatters me a little." She laughed deprecatingly.

"I didn't think that when I saw it," Mrs. Hugh

answered, simply. "You are very good-looking, my dear."

At thirty-one Edith Greene was strikingly handsome. Tall, robust, but not yet giving the impression of set solidity that increasingly marred her looks, she carried herself so well that the florid fashions of 1910 did not spoil the lines of her figure. Her coloring was lovely, dark hair and dark eyes deepened by the steady, warm glow in her cheeks; and her features were well marked but not heavy, though the mouth was set in lines of command and resolution.

Mrs. Hugh looking at the portrait of Edith and her children, and then, turning to look at Edith standing by her side, noticed this accent of command, of over-emphasized self-confidence, but she only said, "Yes, I think it is an excellent piece of work."

"Of course Lavinia is really the keynote of the whole thing," Edith began, eagerly. "You see how she's turned her little head to smile up at me, and how confident she looks. That was quite spontaneous. She was posed looking straight ahead like the boys, but at the second sitting she just put herself like that. It seemed almost a tribute to me, Aunt Sarah. It's wonderful when your child shows its confidence and love."

"Yes, I see," said Mrs. Hugh. "Lavinia certainly is a dear, gay little creature."

"Would you call her expression gay?" asked Edith, disappointed. "It seems much more than that to me."

Mrs. Hugh turned to Edith.

"My dear," she said, "I don't approve of interfering and giving advice, and I've got no children of my own, so I'm really not qualified to speak; but I've sometimes wondered if you're not perhaps a little greedy with your children."

She spoke gently, but the words struck Edith like a blow. Her face flushed deeply, but she answered, coldly and politely:

"I don't think I quite understand you, Aunt Sarah."

"You're an excellent mother, I know," said Mrs. Hugh, "and you must just forgive me for criticizing you; but, my dear, I think perhaps you enjoy too much the mere fact of being a mother, and that is apt to make you expect too much from your children. Not too much affection, of course, but too much faith and admiration."

"I think it only natural to encourage my children to have faith in me."

"Of course you do; but let them know you're fallible, Edith. It only makes for unhappiness

to bring them up to believe you are always right. It isn't natural."

"I would think it much more unnatural if they didn't trust their mother, Aunt Sarah."

"My dear Edith, you don't quite understand me. I'm only hoping that on the one hand you'll let them develop along their own lines, and that on the other hand you won't take their natural love for you as anything so important as a tribute; I think that was the word you used."

"Perhaps it isn't quite easy for us to understand each other on the subject of my feelings for my children. Shall we go upstairs now?"

Edith's voice was icy, but Mrs. Hugh was not daunted by her niece's obvious, though controlled, annoyance.

"No," she said briskly. "I'm going now. I suppose it's only natural that you should resent what I've said, but think it over, Edith; there's something in it."

Mrs. Hugh retired in good trim, but Edith was unable to soothe the sting left by her criticism.

"By the way, Rodney," she began at dinner, "Aunt Sarah was at tea today, and I thought her manner most odd."

"How do you mean, odd? She always seems to me to be full of common sense."

"Well, first of all she asked to see the portrait, and then quite suddenly she attacked me about putting myself on a pedestal before the children and expecting too much from them."

"That sounds very unlike her; she doesn't often butt in."

"I certainly consider that she did today. And as a matter of fact, Rodney, I've thought once or twice that she and your mother are both a little sneering and contemptuous about the way I bring up the children."

"Absolute rot, I call that. Mother's simply devoted to all three of them."

"Yes, but that's not the point," objected Edith. "I know she likes the children, but I'm not sure that she approves of my attitude to them."

"I don't know anything about that," said Rodney uncomfortably.

"No, but don't you see it's a little hard on me? I have always had such a high ideal of motherhood; I've always tried to live up to it, and I do feel I'm justified so far by the results, but neither your mother nor your Aunt Sarah looks at it quite fairly."

"I think it's a bit difficult for them to appreciate all you do for the kids. Outsiders can only

see that you do rather expect all three of them to bow down and worship you, don't you, Edith?"

Rodney's words were softened by his smile, but Edith's calm was shattered.

"You're most unjust," she said, hotly and confusedly. "I've never had any idea of such a thing. It's a ridiculous phrase to use to me simply because I hope for a little love and faith from my children and because I try to influence them in what I think is the right direction. But you never will take it seriously enough, Rodney; it's a constant grief to me that you take their upbringing so lightly."

"Now that *is* unfair, Edith. I think a lot about their education, but while they're still in the nursery they are in your hands. However, now the point has arisen, I might as well say that I do think it would be better if you left them alone a bit more."

"Rodney!" Edith's voice was trembling with anger. "What do you mean?"

"I think they ought to be allowed to think things out for themselves sometimes, and not have to tell you everything and have you discuss it with them. Geoffrey especially; he's quite a big fellow now; he oughtn't to be tied to your apron strings any longer."

Edith rose and pushed back her chair.

"This is really too much," she said, passionately. "First Aunt Sarah, and now you, attacking the things I hold most dear. You must excuse me if I go upstairs; I'm too upset to eat any more dinner."

She left the room, her head held high, and went up to the day nursery, where Geoffrey was having his supper, with a book propped up in front of him.

"Darling," she said, sweeping in, her pale frock trailing, "shall I come and sit with you for a little, while you finish your supper?"

As Geoffrey pushed the book away and edged his cocoa forward, she frowned.

"You're not supposed to read at meals, not even at supper," she said, sharply. "I've told you that before, haven't I, Geoffrey?"

He did not answer.

"Darling," she went on, unconsciously introducing a grieved note into her voice, "you don't like to vex me, I know, but it does vex me when you go against my wishes, and still more when you won't admit to me that you are wrong."

"I like reading," said Geoffrey, rebelliously, "and it's only a few minutes, anyhow."

"But that doesn't make it any less wrong. You know that, Geoffrey."

Again there was no answer, and Edith sighed.

"I don't know what makes you so unresponsive," she reproached him. "It's only this last few months that you've persistently opposed me. You used to confide in me and trust me, like Hugh and Lavinia."

"They're only babies," muttered Geoffrey, awkward and embarrassed.

"Do you mean that because you're a big boy and go to school you feel you can't be open with me any longer?"

"I don't know," said Geoffrey, wearily.

"My dearest boy, it's all so simple." Edith spoke persuasively. "I must be the judge of what is best for you; you must remember I'm your mother." She drew herself up with dignity, and went on: "You can surely understand, dear, that I must know all that my children are doing and thinking, so that I can guide them. Now tell me you were wrong, Geoffrey, and hurry into bed."

"I'm sorry," said Geoffrey. "Good night, mother." He raised his face to be kissed, but she knew that he had not capitulated, he had merely eluded her.

So far the nursery had not proved so soothing

as she had hoped. She went into the night nursery where Lavinia and Hugh were sleeping, and turned up the light. Everything was in order. A little pile of clothes was neatly folded on the rush-bottomed, white-painted chair beside each small bed, the curtains were undrawn, the window open just enough to make the room fresh and sweet. Edith's forehead smoothed itself as she looked about and was satisfied. The small sleepers never stirred; they lay hygienically without pillows, breathing quite correctly through their noses.

Edith felt reassured and quieted. She remembered how difficult it had been for nearly a year to induce Lavinia to go to sleep without sucking a thumb, and how she alone had persevered in the attempt to break this habit which Nurse was confident would cure itself in time.

This small fact led to a train of thought that restored her shattered prestige. She remembered numberless instances when she had been obliged to exercise tact and perseverance to eradicate some budding trait in one or other of the children. She had noticed Hugh's adenoids before the possibility of trouble in the nose had occurred to nurse. It was she, and not Rodney, who dealt with Geoffrey's tendency to deceit and subterfuge, and who

was always called upon to arbitrate in any childish difficulty.

Turning off the light, she went back to the day nursery, where Nurse was sitting, darning.

"Nurse," she said, firmly, "I've said before that Geoffrey is not to read at supper, and tonight again I found him with a book."

"Well, he had only one page to finish the book, Mrs. Greene, so I thought it wouldn't matter for once."

"I don't believe in that, Nurse," said Edith, serenely, "If I make a rule, then it is a rule, and there should be no exceptional cases when you allow it to be broken."

"I'm sorry," said Nurse, stiffly, and Edith went down to the drawing-room, where Rodney was sitting, holding a paper, but looking guiltily over the top of it at the door, evidently expecting her entrance.

"My dear Rodney," she said, "I have been very foolish. It was absurd of me to let myself be vexed by what you said. I know very well that it is only because you cannot possibly enter into my feelings that you misunderstand and misrepresent me."

Rodney was at a loss. He had been prepared to retract his words, but there appeared to be no need

to do so. They had already been discounted. He cleared his throat, trying to think of an appropriate and inoffensive reply, but Edith continued her elaborate little speech:

"I ought to realize by now that nobody can share in a mother's responsibility to her children, nobody can appreciate her ideals."

"Well, that's putting it a bit strong. You know, after all, even a mother is a human being." Rodney spoke with an accent of faint bitterness, but Edith was unperturbed.

"Dear Rodney," she said, "we are a very happy and united family, aren't we? I've just been up to the three little people—Hugh and Lavinia sleeping so sweetly,—and I feel I need no reward for all I do for them except the consciousness that I mean everything to them. That," she ended, nobly, "is all that is necessary to a good mother."

V

As her three children grew older, Edith consciously and tactfully modified her attitude towards them. They had become so accustomed to deferring to her judgment, they had seen their father so constantly adopting her views, and praises

of their wonderful mother had rung so continually in their ears, that when Geoffrey was eighteen, Lavinia sixteen, and Hugh fifteen, they still kept up the habits of childhood in never opposing her.

She could afford by that time to make a show of consulting them, to appear to ask their advice, safe in the conviction that her choice would ultimately be theirs also.

Geoffrey had certainly come through a period of alienation from her, which had shown itself in subterranean rebelliousness and surface rudeness, but he had not been proof against her two weapons —the deadly use of personal sorrow and a skillful trick of light ridicule.

She had seldom been angry with any of the children; it had been enough to induce into her face an expression of pain, into her voice a deep note of suffering, as she said, "Lavinia dear," or "Hugh dear," as the case might be, "I'm sure you don't realize how you've wounded me, but we won't talk of it any more. Have it your own way."

Hugh and Lavinia, desperately conscious of having estranged a mother so beneficent that she would withhold her power and suffer silently, almost invariably gave in immediately, for the pure pleasure of sunning themselves once again in her

favor. With Geoffrey, during what she called "his difficult years," it was otherwise. Sentiment did not move him, but he could not stand up to her gentle, unerring sarcasm, her faculty of always being in the right, and smiling at him as he found himself put in the wrong over some point on which he was convinced he had justice on his side.

There was one occasion on which Geoffrey appealed to his father, but Rodney's reply was final: "Your mother's wishes must be considered, Geoffrey. I could not go against them and I can't imagine that you would care to."

That ended the matter. Geoffrey recognized that his mother had absolute authority over the household, and as he matured he gradually grew to recognize, too, that after all, even if she were inexorable and unassailable, still life went smoothly, and so long as her sway was unquestioned the family atmosphere was an entirely happy one.

He came near to understanding her attitude the year he left school and was about to go up to the university. It had always been an understood thing that, on leaving Oxford, Geoffrey should join his father in the engineering works founded originally by his great-grandfather and carried on by his great-uncle Hugh. A few months be-

fore his first term began Hugh Greene died suddenly and Rodney Greene asked his son to enter the firm at once.

This was a great delight to Edith.

"My dear boy," she said, "I can't tell you how happy I am that you'll be at home with me now for a few years. I know it's a disappointment to you, but it is a pleasure to your mother."

"Didn't you want me to go up to Oxford, then?" Geoffrey asked.

"Of course I did, in one way, but now I feel I'll have three extra years of you, and then later on, when you marry, as I expect you will, I shall still have Lavinia and Hugh; but now while they are both away at school I'd have been very lonely."

"I never really thought of that."

"Of course you didn't." Edith patted his hand. "One's children never do, you know, and mothers learn to be put on one side without any fuss."

"You know, mother, sometimes you talk as if we were frightfully important to you. Are we really?"

Edith looked astounded.

"My dearest Geoffrey!" she said at last. "Your father and you three are all I care about in life, all I work for and plan for. Since I married, my

one thought has been to be a good wife and mother, and I think I can say I've succeeded."

She paused, but Geoffrey did not pay her the expected compliment. He was frowning over his thoughts.

"It doesn't seem quite sound to me. Tell me, mother, haven't you ever had anything of your own in your life?"

"But, darling, what could be more my own than my dear husband and children?"

"I don't mean quite like that. Father is different, of course, but take the three of us. After all, we've our own lives to lead. There are all sorts of things ahead of us, belonging only to us. I really meant, haven't you any interests of your own, intellectual or social or something quite apart from us?"

Edith shook her head.

"No," she said, gravely, "I've never been either a bluestocking or a frivolous woman. I can truthfully say that all my interests are wrapped up in you four."

"It sounds dangerous to me," was Geoffrey's abrupt comment.

"Dangerous, Geoffrey? My dear boy, you're all at sea. When you talk of having things in the future belonging only to you, it just shows me how

little you understand. Listen, dear. You're all three part of me. I've thought about you and loved you since you were tiny, helpless babies. I've watched your characters unfold and guided you this way and that, and whatever you do in the future will always belong, in part, to me. So long as I live you'll be my little son and I'll be sharing in your life."

"I see," said Geoffrey. "It's difficult to understand how you can feel like that about us, but, anyhow, I see that you feel it."

"Wait a few years," Edith smiled. "When you're a father you'll understand me better, though, of course," she added, "a mother's claim is always the greatest."

This conversation made a deep impression on Geoffrey. He was surprised to find how repugnant to him was the idea that his life was inseparably bound up with his mother's, entangled in her cloying web of affection, hopes, and expectations. But he realized that he could never make his feelings clear to her; no words, however brutal, could establish him as a separate and independent entity; she would only suffer a little at the thought that Geoffrey was going through another of his "difficult times."

Determined to spare himself and her that awk-

wardness, Geoffrey no longer rebelled against her gentle interference, but accepted it pleasantly and then quietly pursued his own ideas.

Lavinia, vivid, sensitive, and almost always amenable, was the only one who, after reaching years of discretion, flamed into open defiance and tried to express some of the dumb prisoned resentment that all three felt. Providence, however, stepped in once more, and won for Edith so pretty a victory, that in retrospect the battlefield seemed like a daisied meadow.

Lavinia was nineteen and had been at home for a year. The whole affair blew up out of a chance invitation to a dance which Edith was anxious for Lavinia to accept.

"I really don't want to go, mother," she said. "I don't know them at all, or any of their friends, and I'll have a rotten time. They haven't even asked me to take a partner."

"Well, they did ask Geoffrey. It really is very unfortunate that he has to be away that night. But, Lavinia dear, you really needn't worry. I know Lady Olivia quite well, even though you don't know the family, and I'm perfectly sure she will see that you have lots of partners. Besides, it's a nice house for you to go to."

"You don't understand in the least, mother,"

Lavinia expostulated. "One doesn't go to dances like that nowadays, to be handed over, like a brown-paper parcel, to a different man for every dance. If you do go to a party out of your own set, you must at least take a partner."

"You know, dear, you're being a little unreasonable. I like Lady Olivia and I think this habit of always dancing with the same few men is being overdone: I don't approve of it at all. Now say no more, like a good child. I know you'll enjoy yourself."

"I really can't go," repeated Lavinia, obstinately.

"Very well, dear," said Edith, turning away.

The subject was not reopened till the evening of the dance when Lavinia, going up to dress for dinner, found her white chiffon frock and her white brocade cloak laid out on her bed. She rang for the maid whose services she shared with her mother.

"What are these things for, Stacey?" she asked.

"Mrs. Greene told me you would want your white dress tonight for the dance, Miss Lavinia."

"What dance, did Mrs. Greene say?"

"I think she said it was Lady Olivia Yorke's, miss, but I'm not sure."

"Oh, I see! Thank you; that's all right, then."

Lavinia's cheeks were scarlet, but her eyes were stony. She stood for a moment clutching the frock in her hot hand, then laid it carefully back on the bed and went downstairs.

On the way she met Rayner, the butler, who had been with them for the last ten years, coming up.

"Would you tell me what time you will need the car, Miss Lavinia? Mrs. Greene said you were going out this evening."

"I'm not quite sure, Rayner." Lavinia spoke steadily. "I'll tell you at dinner. Has mother gone up to dress, yet?"

"No, miss, not yet."

"Thank you, Rayner." Lavinia went into the library, where Edith was sitting at her desk, and quietly closed the door.

"Mother," she said, seriously, "did you refuse that invitation for me for Lady Olivia's dance?"

"No, dear, I accepted it."

There was a moment's silence, then Lavinia burst out: "But how could you, mother? I said I wouldn't go. I told you why, that it would be hateful and I wouldn't know anyone, and you said you'd refuse it."

"Lavinia dear, I said no such thing." Edith's voice was calm. "I told you I wanted you to go

to it, and you said you were unwilling; but I explained my reasons, and that surely ended the matter."

She took up her pen again, but Lavinia interrupted.

"It didn't end the matter," she said. "Surely I have some say in my own life. It's perfectly ridiculous, mother. This isn't the nineteenth century, and there isn't another girl I know who can't refuse an invitation if she wants to. It's mad and antediluvian to behave as if I were two."

"You don't know what you're saying," Edith answered sternly. "You're speaking rudely and thoughtlessly. I expect you to fall in with my wishes, and I'm very disappointed at this attitude you've taken up. Perhaps I've been too indulgent with you and given way too much."

Lavinia laughed wildly. "Given way!" she repeated. "Oh no, mother, you never give way. The boys and father and I all knuckle under in everything. I've never seen it so clearly before, but it's true what I say that we aren't allowed to call our souls our own."

"You've said quite enough, Lavinia. I think you'd better ring up Lady Olivia and say you aren't very well and had better be at home tonight."

"No, I'll go. I never wanted to go, but I will. And I'll never be able to forgive you for having cheated me. You made me think you had refused, and all the time you had planned for me to go."

Dinner was a miserable meal. When Lavinia had gone to the dance, Rodney came over and sat on the sofa beside Edith, who looked tired and worn.

"What's wrong, Edith?" he asked. "What's worrying you?"

"I'm desperately worried, Rodney. It's Lavinia. I do everything I can to amuse the child; I arrange parties for her and welcome her friends here; and now tonight she doesn't feel quite happy about a dance she is going to, and she accused me of interfering and deceiving her, and I don't know what else."

"She's spoiled, I expect," suggested Rodney, comfortably. "She's pretty and she's having a good time and people running after her, and her head is a bit turned, don't you think? It's natural to kick over the traces now and again."

"No, Rodney, it isn't natural for any child to speak to her mother as Lavinia spoke to me tonight. I was only acting for the best when I accepted this invitation for her—I like her to get

all the fun she can—but it clashed with some idea she has in her head, and she simply turned on me."

"She'll be sorry when she cools down. She's devoted to you, you know, Edith."

"I can't believe it now. I don't feel things will ever be the same again. I really am utterly wretched; in fact, I think I'll go up to bed now if you don't mind."

Some hours later Edith was wakened by a gentle touch.

A finger of moonlight lying across the floor showed Lavinia in white frock and cloak, standing by the bed.

"Mother," she said, urgently, "I'm so sorry for what I said. I'm glad now that I went, terribly glad."

Edith's sensibilities were fully roused by the deep, excited note in Lavinia's voice.

"Your father's asleep," she whispered. "I'll slip out and come up to your room for a minute or two."

Lavinia stole quietly away, and Edith followed her up to her own bedroom, where she found her sitting on her bed in the dark.

"Don't put the light on, mother," she said. "I'd rather talk in the dark, and there's a lovely

moon. You sit down in my chair and I'll curl up on the bed."

"Lavinia dear," said Edith, "I've had a most miserable evening. You hurt me very cruelly; I almost began to feel I had failed with you."

"I know, mother; I'm so sorry." Lavinia's voice was dreamy. "I didn't really mean it, and it all seems years ago, anyhow. It was wonderful tonight at the dance. There was a man there—" She stopped. "His name was Martin Peile," she added in a whisper.

"My dearest—" began Edith, but Lavinia's soft voice hurried on.

"Lady Olivia introduced him to me at the very beginning. There were programs, and he asked for the third dance, and then after that we didn't dance with anyone else; we sat out together in the little garden. It wasn't very cold, and then at the end we danced again together. I've fallen in love with him, and he has, too, with me." She leaned forward and caught her mother's hand. "Isn't it lucky he did?" she said, fervently. "I couldn't have borne to live another week if he hadn't."

"Lavinia, what are you telling me? My brain's reeling. Do you mean what you say?"

"Oh, I know it's fearfully sudden! I didn't

mean to fall in love for years and years. I know I'm only nineteen and it must be a shock to you and all that, but, mother, it really has happened. I'm engaged to him."

"You can't be engaged," said Edith, utterly bewildered. "Who is he? We don't know him or anything about him. You're quite wild and unlike yourself Lavinia, my child."

"I know I am. I've never been in love before, you see."

"But really, darling, you're going much too fast! Things can't be done all in a hurry like this."

Lavinia did not seem to hear.

"It's too amazing," she said. "Mother, I'll never be able to thank you enough for sending me to the dance. I might easily never have met him. It's terrible to think I might have gone on for years and never known Martin. He says so, too. He says we'll never be able to be grateful enough to you. I told him how dreadful I'd been, and he is longing to meet you. In fact, he's coming tomorrow morning. But really, mother, I do thank you."

Shattered as she was by the thought of the stranger who had so suddenly entered Lavinia's life and so entirely absorbed it, Edith nevertheless

tasted to the full the sweetness of her child's gratitude.

"My darling," she said, tenderly, "we really mustn't go too fast, but I want you to know one thing. Everything I've done has always been in the hope of giving you happiness, and if this turns out satisfactorily it will be the most beautiful thing for me to know that it was I who brought it about."

Lavinia's voice rang with assurance.

"It will turn out all right, mother; there can't be a hitch or a flaw. You'll see, tomorrow."

"Yes, I'll see, tomorrow," said Edith. "And now, dear child, I must go back to your father. Sleep quietly and well and don't be excited."

She kissed Lavinia and held her face for a moment between her hands.

"I'm a very happy mother," she said, "and a very proud one, too, to think I've been able to give you what may very well prove to be the best thing in your life. Good night and God bless you."

CHAPTER IV

Mrs. Edwin Greene

I

THERE hung about Dora Greene an atmosphere of moribundity and stagnation that inevitably led her relations and acquaintances to classify her as a bore.

Her conversation was monotonous, self-centered, and wound its interminable way in and out among the intricacies of her numerous afflictions. The neglect from which she was convinced she suffered, the slights she so patiently endured, and the difficulty of making ends meet on a reduced income formed the dim tapestry of her life.

The genuinely tragic accident which had robbed her of her son lost most of its poignancy by being endlessly referred to in this ignoble context, and the one consistently vivid emotion in her life was her passionate, unsleeping jealousy of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Rodney Greene. Apart from this

and from the frequent scenes which it occasioned —scenes of hysterical reproaches met reasonably, though unsympathetically—Dora Greene fumbled her way through each day, accumulating new grievances and brooding over old ones.

Nevertheless, three times in her life she had lived purposefully and intensely—for half an hour before her first and only proposal, during the few months that her husband was at the front, and for a moment when her son was dying.

II

Dora Pilkington at twenty-four had been that pitiful thing, the victim of an ill-natured mother. Mrs. Pilkington was obsessed by social ambitions, which had been persistently thwarted, some at their tenderest stage of growth, some, more cruelly, when they held out promise of fulfillment.

There had been a bazaar. The celebrity who was to open it failed to arrive. The committee approached Mrs. Pilkington, the vicar's wife, and had, in fact, asked her to perform the ceremony, when another member, hurrying up, had announced the appearance of a certain lady, wife of a commercial knight well established in the county.

With murmurs of, "Thank you so much," and, "Then we needn't trouble you now," the anxious ladies had fluttered away, intent on higher prey, and the vicar's wife was left with her words of acceptance bitter on her lips.

Of the multitude of obstacles which nullified her social projects, the most permanent and unsurmountable were her own over-zealous opportunism, her daughter's inertia, and her husband's earnest single-mindedness. The Reverend Edward Pilkington was a man of limited outlook but sincere purpose. The country parish in which he worked, not cognizant of his limitations, appreciated his sincerity, enjoyed his ministrations, and made endless demands on his time and sympathy.

For the most part, enjoying his work as he did and capable of estimating its usefulness, Edward Pilkington was a happy man. His home certainly lacked serenity, but he asked little of life, and if he was sometimes shamed by his wife's scornful refusals of invitations, and even more shamed by her gushing acceptances, still she was an admirable housewife, and there was always some sick parishioner to provide a ready means of escape from her tongue. When she saw him adjusting his old scarf and searching helplessly for a pair of gloves,

Mrs. Pilkington would raise her eyebrows and inquire acidly:

"What! Am I to be left again this evening?"

To which Mr. Pilkington contented himself by replying, vaguely and apologetically:

"I'm afraid so, my dear. You know a clergyman's time is not his own."

Dora had no means of escape. She returned, at eighteen, from the rather cheap boarding-school where she had spent the last four years, with a vague idea of helping her mother, being useful to her father, and ultimately marrying some delightful and desirable young man. In point of fact, neither parent required her assistance, and her mother, who had hoped with an almost savage intensity for a daughter pretty and clever enough to make a place for herself in the county, was disappointed by Dora's uncertain looks and complete lack of initiative. Gradually Mrs. Pilkington became so embittered by her daughter's inadequacy, that a stumbling reply, any manifestation of the gaucherie natural to unsophisticated eighteen, was enough to provoke an outburst of taunts and ridicule.

The reason for this was incomprehensible to Dora. She knew only that she was a failure, and having tried the effect of an incipient rebellion

against her mother in the form of a muddled and consequently fruitless appeal to her father, she sank little by little into a state of apathy.

It was in the spring of 1900, when Dora was twenty-four, that Mrs. Pilkington's hitherto diffused and generalized unkindness crystallized into a passionate desire to marry her daughter, with whatever difficulty, to any man, however unsuitable. It was intolerable to her to be the only woman for miles around with a marriageable and unmarried daughter. Dora by this time was conscious of but one wish, to escape as much as possible from her mother's criticism. With this object, it was her custom to absent herself for the greater part of the day on long rambling walks. On her return, she was always sharply questioned as to where she had been and whom she had seen, and the replies, nearly always unsatisfactory, were greeted with derision and annoyance.

"You've just been wandering about, have you? You didn't see anyone but old Mr. Crowther, and you didn't speak to him. I wonder what good that will do. You know, Dora, it's all very well to idle about, but a girl with no looks and no money can't afford to pick and choose. You're not getting any younger, are you?"

There was no answer to this type of question.

Dora would mumble something about there being no one to marry, anyhow, and her mother would take her up: "Well, there's young Mr. Lawson at the bank. I don't say he's anything very much, but what do you expect?"

"You know he's utterly impossible, mother," replied Dora, her face scarlet with indignation and embarrassment.

"Well, Dora, I don't really see why you should look for anything better, and you may as well know that I'm tired to death of having you always hanging round the house."

"Father doesn't feel like that, anyhow," retorted Dora, with some courage which was quelled by her mother's reply:

"Your father agrees with me that it is a great pity you are never likely to attract any young man whom we could welcome as a son-in-law."

There were many such conversations, always ending in a decisive victory for the mother and in the daughter's abandonment to resentful tears.

In May, when Mrs. Pilkington heard that The Hall, the only large house in their parish, had been taken by a Mr. and Mrs. Greene with two grown-up sons, she felt that at last her efforts must be crowned with success. The further discovery

that both sons were unmarried lashed her to an unprecedented exhibition of vulgarity.

"That doubles your chances, Dora," she said, triumphantly.

Later, when the news filtered through that the elder son was engaged to a Miss Beckett and would be married in the autumn, she was wrought to a pitch of nervous exacerbation that found vent in threats.

"Well, this is the end, Dora. Unless you manage to get engaged this summer, something will really have to be done about you in the autumn."

Part of Dora's brain registered quite accurately the baselessness of these threats. She knew there was nothing that could be done about her; she knew that her father cared for her; but something in her cringed at the scope that would be added to Mrs. Pilkington's insults after a summer during which she certainly would be thrown into continuous companionship with the younger Greene boy.

Shortly after the Greenes' arrival at the end of June, Mrs. Pilkington, unaccompanied by Dora, went up to call at The Hall in order to review the position. She found it eminently satisfactory. Mrs. Greene was unmistakably a gentlewoman, and both sons, who appeared at tea, were

good-looking and well-mannered. Edwin, the younger, was charmingly diffident, but his face lit up ingenuously when Mrs. Pilkington replied to a remark of his as to the scarcity of young people in the neighborhood.

"Why, that's what my young daughter is always complaining about! You must meet and have a good grumble together."

"It's selfish of you to complain, Edwin," Mrs. Greene interposed, briskly. "You know we've come here in the hope of your father being able to get a little peace to finish his book."

"Is Mr. Greene an author, then?" asked Mrs. Pilkington, delighted to find that he belonged to a profession so distinguished, and still more delighted when she elicited the fact that he was the Geoffrey Greene whose literary public consisted of a small but solid body of good opinion, ready to welcome anything from his pen.

"Of course, my husband writes mostly essays and articles," said Mrs. Greene, explanatorily, "but at present he's engaged on something more ambitious, and he felt it would be a help to get out of town, away from people and things."

"Of course," agreed Mrs. Pilkington. "I quite understand his point of view. You'll find this

quite a nice, quiet neighborhood, but we must try and provide a little amusement for your sons."

She smiled at Edwin as she spoke. Everything seemed very hopeful to her. It was obvious that Edwin was a little bored and restless. His work at the bar was as yet negligible, and the prospect of three months' idling in the country was considerably brightened by the thought of the Pilkington girl, who apparently felt as bored as he did.

He accepted eagerly Mrs. Pilkington's invitation to tennis and supper at the Vicarage a few days hence, but the elder boy, Rodney, refused. He was spending only a few days at The Hall, and was then obliged to return to the engineering works where he was a very junior partner with his uncle.

That evening Dora wandered out into the garden face to face with a clear-cut issue. Her mother's injunctions were perfectly definite: every effort was to be made to attract Edwin Greene, and if Dora could not succeed in eliciting a proposal she must at least entrap him into some unwary declaration which could be taken advantage of.

The sordid meanness of the project was evident, but Dora Pilkington, after six years of endurance, decided that she was ready to fall in with

any scheme that would lead to freedom from the incessant taunts and nagging to which she was subject.

As she looked at the moon she thought vaguely and sentimentally that perhaps he would fall in love with her and it would turn out all right; as she thought of her awkwardness and badly made clothes, this faint hope died, and was succeeded by a resolution to capture, by hook or crook, the one eligible man within reach.

The afternoon when Edwin came to tennis was a success. Dora played passably, and the only other woman was the doctor's young wife, absorbed in herself and her husband. Edwin stayed on to supper, an unusually pleasant meal at which Mr. Pilkington expanded conversationally, and Dora and her mother formed a smiling and apparently harmonious background.

It was a lovely night.

"Would you two young people like to walk down to the river?" asked Mrs. Pilkington.

"May we? That would be more than charming," answered Edwin, and in a few moments Dora found herself strolling through the murmurous summer fields, with a young man saying to her ardently:

"Do let's have a lot of tennis and walks and

picnics, Miss Pilkington. There are so few people round here that you really must put up with me a good deal this summer."

She felt a strange movement in her blood. It was going to be all right, then, no need to plot and plan. She, Dora Pilkington, was embarking on a genuine romance. Her heart beat unevenly, and as she looked at Edwin's young face, clear and dark in the yellow moonlight, she thought suddenly: I love him; I'll do anything for him.

The days that followed were busy and happy, but July merged into August and August into September, and the harvest was stacked in the fields among the shorn poppies.

"Is nothing ever going to happen, Dora?" asked Mrs. Pilkington, and Dora asked herself the same question, still more bitterly.

Apparently nothing was going to happen. Edwin Greene enjoyed and sought her company, but by no word had he ever suggested that his feelings for her were stronger than affection and gratitude towards an acquaintance who was making a dull summer less dull.

One Saturday, after a particularly trying lunch alone with her mother, Dora walked by herself towards the river where she and Edwin had gone on that first, most hopeful night. Edwin, lying

in a canoe tethered to an overhanging tree, saw her white frock coming along the bank above him. He felt comfortably lazy and disinclined to make any move to greet her, but the disconsolate swing of the hat which she was carrying in her hand touched him. He knew by this time that the relations between Dora and her mother were not of the happiest, and he guessed at the trouble that had marred the drowsy afternoon.

When she drew near to the tree under which he was lying he called softly. Startled, she looked around in every direction but the right one, until, guided by his laughter, she parted the branches and leaned through, looking down into the cool, gloomy, green cavern.

Edwin sat up suddenly with a quick intake of breath as he looked at her face framed by leaves and twigs that caught at her tumbled fair hair. Dora had been crying, she was flushed and tremulous, but as she looked at Edwin her eyes brightened and she smiled. In her dishevelment she achieved an unusual warm prettiness, heightened by the contrast between smiling mouth and tear-stained eyes.

"You look simply stunning, Dora," he said, eagerly, "but I can see that something is wrong.

You must let me help you, you really must. Wait a minute till I come up beside you."

This unprecedented offer of help, combined with Edwin's flattering words and look, broke down completely Dora's already shaken self-control. She felt, as on their first walk together, that strange surging in her veins, and her response to it was one of courage and sincerity, virtues as a rule quite alien to her unreliable and compromising nature.

"You can't help me," she said, desperately, turning to him with tears streaming unheeded down her cheeks. "You mustn't even try; you of all people must keep clear of me; you don't understand at all. Mother is determined that you should marry me."

Dora was sobbing loudly and her words were only spasmodically audible.

"You don't know how dreadful mother is," she gasped between sobs. "She's always going on at me about you. You mustn't come and see us any more; it isn't safe for you. I don't know what she mayn't do. She's quite set on it."

Emotions and ideas were crowding in on Edwin; surprise, amounting to amazement; genuine sympathy with the helplessly sobbing girl; pride at the thought that he and he alone could turn her

misery to bliss; and at the same time, against these, the urgings of common sense.

He recognized clearly that he was not in love with Dora Pilkington; he visualized the family difficulties that must inevitably present themselves if he adopted the heroic attitude to which he was drawn. He had shown no inkling of anything beyond the most casual affection for Dora; in conversation he had referred to her as a nice girl and a good companion; but he knew that his mother would certainly perceive an engagement between him and Dora to be the result of some transitory passion which had led to a declaration.

He hesitated, automatically patting Dora's shoulder with murmurs of sympathetic encouragement.

Suddenly she caught his hand and held it to her hot wet cheek.

"You've been wonderful to me," she said; "nobody has even been so kind before; but this is the end now."

This, however, proved not to be true. At the unsolicited tribute, Edwin's young breast swelled with the desire to make a heroic gesture. He thought of the duty that the strong owe to the weak; visions of gallant men and kneeling beggar maids floated cloudily in his brain. He drew

himself up and strove for his most resonant chest notes as he said, gravely:

"Please don't say anything more, Dora. You will make me very happy if you will consent to be my wife."

It was a magnificent gesture and it had its instant reward.

"No, no," cried Dora through her tears, "I couldn't take advantage of your kindness. You don't mean it; it's only that you're so good."

This protest, these doubts hazarded as to his resolution, only served to intensify it, the more so as the sound of his own voice making its formal proposal had struck chill upon Edwin's heart.

"You wrong me," he protested. "Indeed I mean it. It will make me very happy if your answer is yes."

Dora had lived her moment; she had flung away weapons and armor and renounced her hopes. It had been an impulse and she was incapable of carrying it to a conclusion of sustained unselfishness. She knew that Edwin did not love her and that the whole situation was false and garish, but the chance was too good to be let slip.

"Oh, Edwin," she gasped, "indeed it is yes!" and then relapsed into further sobbing.

Edwin, too, had had his moment, but his was

no isolated detachable fragment of his life. The results of it had closed on him like a trap; all that he could do was to follow up the line of conduct imposed on him by his own act. He put his arm round Dora and kissed her gently.

"My dear," he urged, "don't cry any more. Please try not to; it does upset me to see you, and surely everything will be all right now. Let's sit down on the bank and discuss things."

"I'm only crying because I'm so happy," said Dora, attempting to dry her tears. "It's all so wonderful. Mother and father will be so pleased."

Edwin was conscious of a tremor of disgust at the thought of Mrs. Pilkington, but Dora seemed to have forgotten the prelude of frankness which had led to his proposal.

"Will Mr. and Mrs. Greene mind your getting engaged to me?" she asked, tentatively, and Edwin's doubts were lulled by pleasure in her humility and dependence and in his own protectiveness.

"They won't interfere," he assured her, stoutly. "Mother will say I'm too young and we must wait a little and are we sure we know our own minds and so on, but father won't take any part;

he never does; he says everyone must buy his own experience."

At his own careless words Edwin again felt chilled and dismayed; he was buying his so dear, at the cost perhaps of all his future happiness.

Suddenly, in a fever of impatience to make it irrevocable and be quit of doubts and tremors, he dragged Dora to her feet.

"Let's go home at once," he said, "and tell them we're engaged. Let's get all the fuss over and be married as soon as we can. I'm not earning any money yet, but I shall soon, and father gives me a decent allowance."

As they walked back to the Vicarage through the warm afternoon, Dora thought vaguely of how, crossing these fields an hour ago, she had been disconsolate, futureless, forlorn.

The miseries of her immediate past were already dimming; her facile and slovenly character found in her present triumph enough satisfaction to obscure the legitimate rancor of six sordid years.

III

Shortly after his marriage, which took place in the spring of 1901, Edwin Greene found that

the qualms which had shaken him at the very moment of proposing to Dora Pilkington were amply justified.

His father had increased his allowance in order to make it possible for him to marry and take a small house while waiting and hoping for work to materialize. Dora, who had chosen the house in Maida Vale, furnished it with the help of her mother, who, since the announcement of the engagement, had been her daughter's admirer and ally, and had thrown herself with zest into preparations for the wedding.

It was an inconvenient little house, made still more inconvenient by the profusion of small tables, ornaments, and unnecessary objects which cluttered up the floor space and made it impossible to cross the room with any ease. To Dora these represented the perfection of gentility; this picture was a signed water-color, that vase a wedding present from the choir, the rug in front of the fire, superimposed on a larger rug of different pattern, had come from Dora's own home, which gradually acquired in her mind an aura of sanctified sentimentality.

Three months after her marriage she referred to "my old home in the country" in such languishing tones that Edwin, who had been the easy

victim of the old home's cruelty, could not restrain himself, and burst out, "My dear Dora, for goodness' sake don't talk like that; you know perfectly well you were utterly miserable at home."

Resentful of this plain speaking, not even recognizing its truth, Dora shed a few tears through which she contrived to utter: "You do exaggerate shockingly, Edwin. I really think you might try and spare my feelings more."

"Well, I'm sorry, and I don't say it wasn't a better home than this."

Edwin looked gloomily round the crowded little drawing-room; but Dora immediately flamed up in its defense.

"There you are, criticizing again. You only do it because mother and I chose it. It's a lovely little house, and I'm sure I take enough trouble to keep it nice. Look at the way I dust all the china myself every morning."

Her sobs redoubled in vigor, but Edwin sat humped up in his chair.

He wondered if all young wives cried on an average three times a day, and if all women twisted every remark into an insult directed against themselves, their taste, or their relations. There must be some who don't, he thought, drearily, some women that you can talk to without hav-

ing to remember not to say this or that. Oh, well, it's my own fault, I suppose. I must make the best of it.

He got up, came over to where Dora sat, and awkwardly patted her bowed head.

"Don't cry," he said, and even as he said the words he wondered savagely how often he had said them since the day of his engagement. He pushed the thought away.

"Don't cry," he repeated, mechanically. "I must go and do some work in my study."

"But you do like the house?" Dora looked up at him plaintively.

"Of course I do," he answered, reassuringly, and when he stumbled over a footstool on the way to the door, he put it tidily on one side instead of kicking it under the nearest table, as he was tempted to do.

By 1904, when Dora was expecting her first child, their positions were reversed. After one visit to her sister-in-law's new house in Sussex Square, Dora came back to Maida Vale discontented and jealous. She attacked Edwin that night after dinner with a complaint which could not fail to arouse his annoyance.

"Oh, Edwin, I went to tea with Edith today, and I do think it's dreadfully unfair that she and

Rodney should have so much more money than we have."

Edwin felt completely helpless. He knew by this time that if Dora felt a thing to be unfair, no amount of proof to the contrary would convince her, but he felt constrained to reason gently with her petulance, which he supposed to be in part due to her condition.

"I don't think you see it quite clearly," he urged. "Rodney and I both have the same allowance from father, but for one thing he is three years older than I, and then, being in the Works with Uncle Hugh, he is bound to make more money than I do at first."

"I don't see why," said Dora, rebelliously.

"The bar's always slow at the beginning," explained Edwin. "You know I've often told you it may be a long time before I make a decent income."

"It seems very cruel to me," said Dora, her voice trembling with self-pity. "Here am I boxed up in this little house, and there's Edith with her lovely new drawing-room and two perfect nurseries."

"But I thought you liked this house!" Edwin was upset at the new development.

"I don't. I hate it. It's a mean little house,

and I know perfectly well that Edith looks down on it, and me, and you, and everything. But there's no use speaking to you; you won't do anything about it."

She left the room, holding her handkerchief to her eyes in a gesture so familiar that Edwin did not notice it.

He sat still, oppressed by the bitterness of his thoughts. All his youthful flamboyance was gone, and with its going he had gained immensely in appearance.

Edwin Greene at twenty-nine was extremely good-looking in the austere manner affected by young barristers. He looked older than his age and the lines from nose to mouth were deeply carved, but the modeling of his face, with its unmistakable resemblance to his mother, was excellent.

"I'm damnably handicapped," he thought, "and there's no way out. I'm beginning to get on now. With luck, another five or six years will see me with as much work as I can tackle, but what's the use of it all."

The door opened gently, and Dora came in and knelt by his side.

"Oh, Edwin dear," she said, "I never meant to get so cross. I am sorry. But I feel so ill and

miserable these days, and it was just too much for me to see Edith's beautiful new house."

At the recollection her mouth trembled again, and Edwin roused himself from his abstraction.

"Don't worry," he said, heavily. "We'll be able to have a house like that later on. But in the meantime you must try and not make yourself so wretched over things."

"Oh, Edwin, I do try, but I feel so terribly ill! You can't possibly understand what I'm feeling."

"I'm sure it's perfectly rotten for you, but do you think you go out enough? It's supposed to be good to take a little exercise, isn't it?"

"I do go out a little, of course, but I really don't like to be seen very much."

"I think that's nonsense, Dora. Edith tells me that before her two babies were born she used to go out every day and just not think of it. And she's having another now, isn't she? But she seems quite bright."

Dora's face flamed. "It's all very well for Edith," she exclaimed, loudly. "She's got other nice things to think about, and, anyhow, she's as strong as a horse. But it's very different for me."

She flounced from the room for the second time, and, listening to the sounds overhead, Edwin

judged rightly that this second flight was final and she would now withdraw for the night.

Their son, Edwin Pilkington, was born and lived for the first five years of his life in the same small house that had provoked so many battles between his parents.

Dora was an injudicious mother, prodigal of caresses, bribes, scoldings, and injunctions. Nurses and nursery governesses succeeded one another so rapidly that the little boy had no sooner got used to eating, sleeping, and going for walks with one person than another was immediately substituted. This was partly because no one could put up for long with the suspicions and jealousies of such an employer and partly because Dora suffered so intensely when she saw her son developing any affection for whoever was in charge of him, that she immediately trumped up some excuse for getting rid of the interloper.

The small Edwin, living in this state of emotional bewilderment, gradually grew to rely on his quiet and repressed-looking father as the one normal, steady person in an otherwise chaotic existence.

Edwin himself, who had looked forward with foreboding to the birth of the child, was surprised

and amused when he found what pleasure he gained from his son's companionship.

By 1909 he was a busy man with a steadily increasing income, and Dora was able to move to the larger house on which her heart had been set since Edith's move to Sussex Square. For a time she was so happily occupied in furnishing and decorating that life flowed more evenly for both husband and son. The former was spared anything in the nature of a scene for some months; days and even weeks went by without Dora having recourse to her favourite weapon—tears—and the younger Edwin for nearly a year enjoyed the ministrations of the same nursery governess.

This tranquil state of things was only a lull. It occurred to Edwin one day that the time had come for his son's education to begin. He mooted the project very tentatively to Dora, hoping that the idea of looking for a suitable kindergarten would prove some solace for what he knew she would regard as a tragic break in her relationship with the little boy.

His hopes were unfounded. As he mentioned the word "school," she produced her handkerchief and before the end of his sentence she was sobbing bitterly.

"It's the beginning of the end," she wept, "the

beginning of the end. He'll never be mine again; once he goes to school he is lost to me."

In vain Edwin pointed out half-jocularly that it was the inevitable destiny of mothers to lose their sons in this way; in vain he attempted to console her by saying it would be for only a few hours daily. She was unconsolable.

"It's the beginning of the end," she repeated. "You don't understand how a mother feels, but at least you might postpone it for a year or two."

But Edwin was determined that some consistent influence should be brought to bear on his son's impressionable nature, and he persisted.

A satisfactory kindergarten was decided on, and this in turn was succeeded by a day school.

The younger Edwin adapted himself very easily to school life, but retained an immense admiration for his father, which at times provoked his mother to jealous annoyance.

"You're silly about your father," she would say. "It's all very well for me to take you about with me, but it isn't manly to hang round your father as you do."

However, Edwin, so easily swayed in many ways, presented a quietly stubborn front to her on this point, and continued to seek his father's company.

In the summer of 1914, when he was nearly ten, a severe battle raged over his head.

He had been entered for a preparatory school for the Lent term of 1915, but a vacancy had unexpectedly occurred and Edwin was anxious for the boy to take advantage of it and go one term earlier than had been arranged.

Dora set her face against it.

"You really are very unreasonable," said Edwin at last, thoroughly exasperated.

"I may or may not be," answered Dora, always ready to complicate the issue, "but Edwin's not looked so well lately, and, after all, I'm his mother, and I ought to know whether or not he's ready for a boarding-school."

"I know he isn't looking too well. That's another reason why I'm keen for him to start next term. He'll be better out of town."

"You mean he'll be better away from me?" asked Dora on that rising note which preceded a hysterical outburst.

"I mean nothing of the sort. I mean precisely what I say, that he'll be better out of town, and I've decided once and for all that he is to go at the end of these holidays."

"So I'm to have no say in it; I'm only his mother, to be pushed aside and ignored."

"I'm extremely sorry you take it like this, Dora, but I'm not open to changing my mind this time," answered Edwin, and left the house for chambers before the storm of tears, which was the conclusion of all arguments, burst over the household.

The subject was not, however, finally disposed of till the evening in August when Edwin, who had felt it impossible to leave London at the outbreak of war, came home and said, rather abruptly:

"I'm afraid you won't approve of what I've done, Dora, but I felt I really couldn't keep out of things, so I applied for a commission a few days ago, and have got it all right."

To his surprise, Dora answered, quietly: "Oh, Edwin, that's splendid!" and then fell silent.

He eyed her distrustfully. He could have understood a manifestation of emotional patriotism that would have culminated in a fit of sobbing on his breast, or a paroxysm of sentiment and pride, but what he really expected was an impassioned reproach for his cruelty and selfishness in being willing to abandon her.

This quietness and restraint was the one attitude he had not dared to hope for.

Dora was obviously making a determined effort at self-control. She stood in front of him, twist-

ing her hands a little, but showing no signs of hysteria.

"I'm glad about it," she said at last, "I think it will be good for us to have a big break like this. You know, Edwin, things haven't gone quite as I meant. I know I've never really pleased you, and yet I meant to try so hard when I married you. But I think perhaps after this it will be different."

Edwin looked at her curiously.

"It's been my fault," she continued, simply, "so it's I who must change myself, and in the meantime I'll do all I can to help instead of hindering."

"You've helped me enormously by the way you've taken this," said Edwin, warmly. "I was afraid you'd be very upset. You see, dear"—he hesitated and then plunged—"I'm afraid it'll mean I must be off to a training camp the day after tomorrow."

Dora's newly discovered composure appeared unshakable.

"We'll have a good deal to do getting you ready," she said. "But don't worry, we'll manage all right."

Throughout the three months of Edwin's training in England, even during the trying days of his

last leave, she maintained this admirable self-command.

It lasted, indeed, until the spring of 1915, when she received news of Edwin's death.

At that her resolution broke. It seemed to her that Providence had played her an unwarrantable trick. She had vowed to be a different woman, she had been a different woman, and this was her reward, that her husband had been taken from her.

She sat looking dumbly at the telegram, while floods of self-pity rolled over her. Suddenly she realized that nobody knew yet, that Mr. and Mrs. Greene and Rodney ought to be told at once. At the thought of Rodney working hard, but in safety, at his engineering works, she was suddenly seized by a fervor of hysterical resentment.

Unclenching her damp hands, she went to the telephone and rang up his house.

"I want to speak to Mrs. Rodney, please," she said. "Mrs. Edwin speaking."

In a moment she heard Edith's voice.

"Hullo, Dora! Did you want me?"

"Edwin's dead," she stated baldly into the telephone.

"What did you say?" asked Mrs. Rodney, for once at a loss.

"Edwin's been killed," said Dora, her voice rising dangerously.

"My dear Dora!" she heard. "This is terrible! I'll come round at once. I'm dreadfully sorry!"

"Oh, are you?" shouted Dora. "It's an easy thing to be. You've got your husband at home safely tied to your apron strings. You can afford to be sorry for me, can't you?"

"Hush, Dora!" Mrs. Rodney's voice sounded authoritatively down the wire. "You must control yourself. I'll come round to you at once."

But it was too late to stop the outburst.

"Come if you like. I won't see you." Dora was screaming now. "You've always done your best to spite me, and you needn't pretend now that you've ever cared for Edwin or me. You've always had more luck and more money, and now I've lost Edwin, too, and I know perfectly well you think I deserve it, but at least my husband doesn't hide like a coward in his engineering works."

Her voice died away as it dawned on her that Edith had rung off. She was speaking to nobody.

As she hung up the receiver she caught sight of the parlormaid's scared and anxious face looking over the banisters.

"When Mrs. Rodney calls, tell her I can't see

her," she said, harshly. "Mr. Greene's dead; he's been killed."

She pushed past the maid on the stairs, and burst into her own room, wringing her hands and crying loudly.

IV

After his father's death young Edwin Greene found school holidays very trying. He continued to miss his father both as an actual presence and as the restful element in the house, and he found himself embroiled in a series of exhausting scenes with his mother. These scenes ended in still more exhausting reconciliations, during which she would hold him clasped in her arms while she repeated that she was now a widow and he her only hope, in accents varying from the genuinely tearful to the luxuriously sentimental.

The fact that Edwin was only a child of ten did not deter her from reproaching him bitterly when he wriggled, embarrassed, from her embrace, and stood sullenly beside her, anxious only to get away from an emotional situation with which he could not cope.

Exasperated by what she took to be indifference,

she would stress still further the note of affection.

"You're all I've got now, Edwin, and it seems as though you don't care about me at all. Surely you can tell me that you'll love me and look after me, now your father's gone."

Shifting his weight from one foot to the other, staring at the carpet in an agony of uneasy bewilderment, Edwin would mutter, "Of course I shall."

"Is that all you can say?" Dora would cry, the familiar note of hysteria creeping into her voice. "Leave me, then; I'm better alone than with a son who doesn't love his mother."

Guiltily conscious that something was expected of him, but not knowing what it was, Edwin would seize his opportunity to escape from the room, and the whole scene would be renewed later.

In time, however, Dora found it impossible to feed the flames of despair on Edwin's mute discomfort, and she resigned herself to a state of aggrieved self-pity.

A year or two after his father's death, Edwin, who had grown wary and perceptive, realized that his mother's greatest pleasure in life was to invite a few women friends to tea, to play bridge, or to spend the evening, and then to embark on a pro-

longed and enjoyable narration of her grievances; which was sure to be followed by an equally prolonged recitation of similar grievances endured by one or other of the ladies present. Conversation would continue along these lines until everyone had exposed to her satisfaction the more intimate difficulties, annoyances, and sorrows of her private life.

Expressions of sympathy having been exchanged, the depressing coterie would break up, to meet again a few days hence and go over the same ground with undiminished ardor.

On one occasion Edwin found himself involved in a painful scene not only with his mother, but with one of his mother's friends, a Mrs. Pratt, whom he instinctively disliked and distrusted. It was during the summer holidays of 1917. For the last few years the person with whom he had most in common, apart from his school friends, was old Mrs. Greene, his father's mother.

He was invited regularly to spend part of his holidays with his grandparents in the country, and the tranquil, undisturbed atmosphere of their house was very welcome to him. He was on terms of easy intimacy with both grandparents; they accepted him unquestioningly without any of these probing inquiries into the state of his emotions

which made life at home so difficult for the rapidly developing boy.

At the beginning of these holidays he had already spent a week with Mr. and Mrs. Greene before going to Bournemouth for a month with his mother. But now there still remanied a fortnight before going back to school, and a letter had come from his grandmother inviting him to stay again for as long as he could.

He opened the subject at breakfast.

Dora had been frowning over her newspaper as she read his letter, and she suddenly burst out: "Well, I must say I don't see why the *Times* should report that Rodney and Edith were at the Ledyard wedding, and leave my name out of the list. But some people always manage to get their names in the papers."

Edwin realized that the moment was not propitious, but his eagerness carried him beyond the need for discretion.

"I say, mother," he began, "I've got a letter from grannie asking me to stay for a bit. Could I go tomorrow, do you think? There isn't very much of the holidays left."

Dora put down her paper and looked at him.

"You want to go, then, Edwin?"

"Rather," Edwin assented, heartily. "I'd love it."

He stopped, dismayed, as he saw his mother's hand grope for her handkerchief and her face slowly crumple into misery.

"I did enjoy Bournemouth," he began, "but I just think a little while with grannie would be nice."

Dora burst into tears.

"Oh, Edwin!" she sobbed. "Oh, Edwin! This is a terrible blow to me. You're all I've got, everything I do is for you, and now you say you'd rather be with your grannie than with me."

She sobbed on as Edwin got up and came round to her end of the table.

"Of course I don't mean that," he said. "I'm awfully sorry, mother. I won't go if you don't want me to, but of course it would be rather decent there."

"This is my reward. This is what comes of all my devotion to you. Oh, Edwin, I didn't think you could have hurt me so!"

"But I've said I won't go. I can't help wanting to, but I've said I won't and I don't see why that hurts you."

Dora dried her tears and took his hand.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "you'll never know

what pain a mother feels when her child wants to leave her. But when I'm dead you'll be glad you offered to stay." She put away her handkerchief and added, heroically: "You may go, Edwin. I like you to do what makes you happy."

Edwin's face brightened.

"May I really, mother? Thanks most awfully. I'd love it. Do you think I may go tomorrow?"

Dora Greene looked pained, but only answered in a fading voice:

"Yes, Edwin, you may go tomorrow," and left the room.

Edwin felt a little damped, but when he sat down to write to Mrs. Greene that he would arrive the following day, his spirits rose again.

His mother was out for lunch, so he ate it alone, and afterwards went for a solitary walk, elated to think that there would be no more hanging about in London with nothing to do. The ten days before school began stretched pleasantly ahead, and as he came quietly into the drawing-room for tea, his cheeks flushed with walking, he looked a happy, carefree, small boy.

Mrs. Pratt was sitting on the sofa beside his mother.

"How do you do, Edwin?" she said, gravely.

"Your poor mother's just been telling me how upset she is."

Edwin looked both surprised and concerned. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Mrs. Pratt looked at him reproachfully and shook her head slowly from side to side as she said:

"Oh, Edwin! To think you've forgotten already how you grieved her this morning!"

"Don't say anything more," interrupted Dora, smiling bravely. "I suppose it is weak of me to be so hurt, and since Edwin wants to go and leave me, he must just do it."

"Listen to your mother," urged Mrs. Pratt, admiringly, "never thinking of herself, always planning for your happiness, and then see if you've the heart to go against her wishes."

Edwin felt that he had been treated with some sort of subtle treachery. His brows were drawn into a scowl, and he looked sullen and resentful as he said, stubbornly:

"I don't know what you mean. I told mother I wouldn't go to grannie if she didn't want me to, but she said I might, and I've written, and now I'm going."

He half turned away, but Mrs. Pratt laid her hand on his arm as her voice went on, gently:

"That action was so like your wonderful mother, dear boy. You're all she's got, and yet she'll sacrifice herself to let you go if you want. Now don't you think you could make a little sacrifice for her and stay at home?"

Edwin kicked the leg of the tea table and fidgeted with his hands, but he did not answer.

"You see it's no use," said Dora, bitterly. "He'll do nothing for me. Better say no more."

She poured out tea, clattering the china in her nervous annoyance.

Mrs. Pratt began again:

"Oh, Edwin dear, I'm sure you don't mean to be unkind——," but Edwin interrupted her rudely. His mouth was shaking, but his voice was quite steady.

"It isn't fair," he said, passionately. "It isn't fair of mother to begin at me again. She shouldn't have told you anything about it. I said I'd do what she wanted, but it was all arranged that I could go, and now she's gone and raked it all up again with you. But I'm going all the same."

He stopped confusedly, and became aware of his mother moaning, gently: "Oh, Edwin! Oh, Edwin!" Mrs. Pratt was repeating, in her amazement, "Well, I'd never have believed it, I'd never have believed it!"

"Believe what you like," Edwin addressed her, distractedly, and turned to his mother. "Don't go on saying 'Oh, Edwin!'" he shouted. "I hate my name; I hate everything!"

He ran from the drawing-room, and Mrs. Greene subsided into tears.

"My poor Dora!" said Mrs. Pratt, soothingly. "My poor, dear Dora, what a terrible afternoon! I know how sensitive you are and how you must suffer from such a scene."

"Indeed I do. Nothing could be more unlike me. But what can I do? My son's been taken from me by his grandmother. I'm powerless against her."

"It's shocking, really shocking, and especially when you've got nobody but him!"

"I've always been lonely; I've had very little happiness since I was a girl. When I look back to my old home and then think of what I've suffered since I left it, I often wonder I've lived so long."

"You're wonderful Dora, always so brave, always putting the best face on things."

"I do try," said Dora, beginning to brighten. "But, oh, how difficult it is when Edwin behaves to me like this."

"I don't think you should worry. I'm sure it must be Mrs. Greene's influence. No boy of his

age could possibly behave like that unless his mind was being poisoned."

"Do you really think so?" asked Dora with interest.

"I do," said Mrs. Pratt, dropping her voice to a mysterious note. "And I really think you ought to work out some scheme to prevent it."

"But what can I do?" There was a pause, and then Mrs. Pratt spoke, triumphantly.

"I know, Dora. I've thought of the very idea. You must let him go this visit, and then towards the end of next term you must write and say you're not at all well, and the doctor is very anxious about you and says that you must be spared all worries and troubles."

"But I'm quite well," said Dora, limply.

"Yes, of course, I know you are, but don't you see? It's a real opportunity for you if you do that. He can't go and stay with the old woman if your heart is weak, and gradually you can get him away from her influence."

"I'll do anything for Edwin. You know that, Violet. I'll make any sacrifice for him, anything to free him from this terrible effect his grannie is having on him."

Dora spoke earnestly, beginning to believe,

under the spell of Mrs. Pratt's suggestion, that Mrs. Greene was indeed exercising a malign influence on her son.

The plot to rescue Edwin was gradually evolved in all its details, but it was never carried out.

Early in November Dora received a telegram that sent her straight to Waterloo, and thence —after a hideous hour of waiting for a train— down to Edwin's school, where she was greeted by his pale and anxious-looking headmaster.

"I have very bad news for you," he said. "I find it utterly impossibly to express my regrets and sympathy."

"Is Edwin alive?" asked Dora Greene, steadily.

"Yes, he is alive," answered Mr. Foster. "But the doctor has seen him and the spine is severely injured. He is quite unconscious."

"Will he live?"

Dora Greene, to whom tears came so easily, was dry-eyed and stony as she asked the question and listened to the answer.

"Only for a few hours. He may regain consciousness before the end."

"Tell me exactly how it happened, please."

"It appears that this morning during the recreation half-hour, Edwin and another boy were

so foolish as to dare each other to walk around the gymnasium roof on the coping that you can see from here." Mr. Foster moved over to the window as he spoke. Mrs. Greene followed him and stood looking at the long, high building jutting out from the side of the house.

"Is that the coping," she asked, "where that bird is?" A pigeon was walking jerkily along the narrow ledge, stopping every now and again to nod its head with meaningless little movements.

"Yes, that's it. I need hardly tell you that it is absolutely against the rules to do so, and indeed no boy has ever before made the attempt. Edwin was to go first. He climbed out through a dormitory window, up a sloping piece of roof, and from that on to the coping. He walked quite steadily the full length of the building, but at the corner the boys think he looked down and got dizzy. Anyhow, he fell."

Mr. Foster stopped for a moment. His voice was husky as he continued:

"I was there in a few minutes; the matron, too; but he was quite unconscious. When the doctor came we moved him into a ground-floor room, and the doctor fitted up a bed and made his examination."

Mr. Foster looked desperately at the silent woman confronting him, and said again:

"I cannot tell you, Mrs. Greene, what this means to me. It's the most tragic thing that has happened in all my school career."

"I should like to see Edwin now, please," said Mrs. Greene, and was taken to the class-room where Edwin lay, his eyes closed, his rosy face pale and drawn, on an improvised bed.

The matron, who was sitting beside him, rose and offered her chair to Mrs. Greene, who sat down, still silent. All through the evening she sat there, gazing unflinchingly at the small figure on the bed. The doctor came in and spoke to her, but she did not answer. Food was brought on a tray, but she refused it. The matron sat opposite her on the other side of the bed, occasionally moving a pillow or bending down to listen to the child's uncertain breathing.

Towards eleven o'clock Edwin's heavy eyelids lifted and he looked vaguely at his mother.

"I didn't know you were here, mother," he said, uninterestedly.

"I've just come to see you, darling," said Dora Greene, stooping to kiss him.

"Am I ill?" he asked.

"Yes, Edwin, you've had a bad accident."

Presently he asked, still passively:

"Am I going to die, do you think?"

"You've hurt yourself rather badly, dear," his mother answered, and could not keep a tremor from her voice. He lay still with closed eyes. At the first sign of consciousness the matron had hurried from the room. She now came back with the doctor, who lifted Edwin's hand to feel his pulse and then laid it gently back on the coverlet.

Suddenly Edwin opened his eyes.

"I say, mother," he said, with more animation than he had shown, "if I'm going to die, I'd awfully like to smoke a cigarette first."

Dora looked at the doctor, who shook his head. She stood up and drew him a little aside.

"Give me a cigarette," she said in a savage undertone. "Give me one at once. It can make no difference."

"I hardly think ——" he began, helplessly.

But she interrupted, still in an undertone of concentrated intensity: "Give me it at once. I insist."

The doctor handed her his case. She took out a cigarette.

"There, darling," she said to Edwin, and her

voice was soft again. "Look, I'll put it in your mouth for you and light it."

The doctor gave her a match and she held the little flame steadily to Edwin's cigarette. He drew in a breath and choked a little.

"It's ripping," he said, thickly. "Thanks awfully, mother." His eyelids fell again and the cigarette dropped from his flaccid lips. With a little choking sigh Edwin Greene died.

Mrs. Greene stood still, but in a moment the doctor took her arm.

"He's gone, Mrs. Greene, poor little chap. Will you come away now?"

But with a loud moan Dora Greene fell on her knees and subsided in a passion of tears over the body of her son.

"He's gone," she cried, "gone and he never loved me. First his father took him from me, and then his grandmother, and now he's dead and I'll never have him."

For a moment both doctor and matron were taken aback by the sudden change from rigid self-control to complete abandon, but as the sobs turned into laughter and screams, both regained their composure. With some difficulty they half led, half carried, Dora Greene to the school sanatorium, where she passed the night between tears,

hysteria, and passionate vituperations against the father and grandmother who had robbed her of her son during his short life.

V

During the next few months Mrs. Pratt proved herself so willing a confidante, so soothing and consoling a listener, that Dora Greene finally asked her to come and live with her.

The arrangement worked surprisingly well. Life settled into a routine of gossip, bridge, and tea parties, broken only by a joint summer holiday and an occasional week at Easter when Dora went to stay with her father, now a widower, but still running his small parish competently and successfully.

It was tacitly understood between the two ladies that when Mrs. Greene had indulged in a long narrative embracing every sorrow and grievance of her existence, she should pay for the luxury of having an audience by performing that function in her turn.

Mrs. Pratt's saga confined itself to full details of her sufferings at Mr. Pratt's hands during the months that preceded his departure from this life in a violent attack of delirium tremens.

Mrs. Greene was already acquainted with the history of Mr. Pratt's life and death, but it made good hearing none the less, and on the other hand Mrs. Pratt particularly enjoyed the point in Mrs. Greene's reminiscences at which handkerchiefs were brought out and they recalled what a happy, bright boy, little Edwin had been.

"Those were happy days," Dora would sigh, fondly. "I was a happy wife and mother till death stole both my treasures."

"But you've been so wonderfully brave, dear," Mrs. Pratt would murmur. "See how you've built up your life again."

"I have been lucky in having you to help me. I couldn't have done it without you, Violet. You know how little use the Greenes have been to me."

This was an immensely satisfactory opening. Violet Pratt, a solitary woman except for her friendship with Dora Greene, enjoyed vicariously the many slights and rebuffs which Dora considered that she endured from her husband's relations.

By 1928 this list of slights had been added to by both Mrs. Rodney's daughters-in-law. Helen, Mrs. Geoffrey Greene, had failed to call on her

Aunt Dora for nearly two years, and had moreover never once invited her to a meal of any sort.

"Not even tea," said Dora, acidly. "And you can hardly think that would be too much trouble even in a small house."

"Indeed you cannot," Mrs. Pratt answered, warmly. "And especially after the kind way you asked her to dinner as a bride."

But the most recent insult was naturally the most interesting.

At the wedding of Hugh and Jessica, only three weeks ago, Mrs. Edwin, arriving a little late when the bride was already in the church, had been hustled into a back seat instead of being allowed to take her place in one of the front pews with the rest of the family.

"Of course I don't really blame Jessica," said Dora, as she had already said some twenty or thirty times during the last three weeks. "But still it just shows. Some arrangement should surely have been made for me to take my proper place, and even if I was a little late, well, I haven't a motor like some of the others."

"I expect it was all Mrs. Rodney's doing," suggested Mrs. Pratt, darkly.

Dora pounced on this.

"Do you really think so?" she asked, eagerly.

"Well, I wouldn't be surprised at anything after the way she has always looked down on me and put me on one side."

It was at this propitious moment that the maid brought in a letter at which Dora exclaimed, triumphantly:

"There now, talk of the devil ——"

She read the letter and handed it to Mrs. Pratt.

"Read that, Violet," she said. "Read it and tell me what you think of it. I should think that even Edith might have remembered that next week is the anniversary of little Edwin's death. Not the actual day, of course, but I should think that a different week altogether would have shown more courtesy and consideration. She knows I always keep these few days sacred to my memories."

Mrs. Pratt read the short letter.

207 Sussex Square.
November 12th.

Dear Dora,

I hear that Aunt Sarah is to be in town next week when Hugh and Jessica get home from their honeymoon, and I feel it would be nice both for her and for Mrs. Greene to have a reunion with the young people. There are six of us now, and my idea is to have a little dinner party next Friday night at 7.45, for the six Mrs. Greenes. I do hope you

will be able to come. Both the old ladies are getting rather frail now, and I think it would give them pleasure.

With love from Rodney and myself,
Your affectionate sister-in-law,
EDITH GREENE.

Mrs. Pratt sniffed.

"I see," she said, venomously. "I see, Mrs. Rodney makes it sound like a treat for her mother-in-law, but I suppose it's just to make another opportunity for showing off."

"Of course it is," answered Dora, angrily. "And what a cruel week to choose. She can't have forgotten old Mrs. Greene's wickedness to my poor little Edwin, and yet she asks me to meet her almost on the anniversary of his death. And I don't at all care about meeting Hugh and Jessica after the way I was treated at their wedding."

"I should refuse, if I were you, Dora."

"I've a good mind to do so. I should think even Edith would have known better than to ask me to a party next week."

"Perhaps she doesn't mean you to accept."

"That's probably it, Violet. I believe you're right. She's chosen that date purposely so that I shan't go. Well, she'll be disappointed for once. I'll go. I'll write this minute and tell her that

I'll come, but that I think she should have known better than to ask me."

Dora Greene moved over to her desk.

"Come and help me, Violet," she said. "We must concoct a good letter."

The two ladies sat happily down to accept with the maximum of ungraciousness the invitation which would provide them for weeks to come with a fruitful topic of discussion and complaint.

CHAPTER V

Mrs. Geoffrey H. Greene

I

IT was at Lavinia's wedding that Geoffrey was introduced to a tall girl wearing a green frock and a green hat fitting her head so closely that only two small curves of bright hair were visible on her cheeks.

She looked moody and impatient, and when he asked if she had seen the presents she said: "No, thanks, I don't want to."

Slightly repelled by her manner, but attracted by her lime-green frock and her copper-beech hair, Geoffrey tried again.

"Shall we get out of the crowd and find a peaceful corner somewhere?"

She shook her head.

"No, I don't really think it's worth while," she said. "I'm going home now. I wouldn't have come at all if I hadn't been afraid Martin's par-

ents would be piqued, but now they've both seen me, so I can quite justifiably escape."

Geoffrey noticed that her eyes were a clear, cool gray that contradicted the warmth of her hair, and he liked the wide smile that lightened her face as she explained her presence at the wedding, so there was a trace of eagerness in his voice as he asked:

"Are you a Peile relation, then? I'm sorry, I didn't hear your name when we were introduced."

"Yes, I'm a sort of cousin of Martin's. My name's Helen Guest. I didn't hear your name, either, but you're a Greene, of course."

"I'm Lavinia's brother."

"Yes, I thought you were. You're rather like her. She's extremely pretty, isn't she, but not at all paintable."

"Do you paint, then?" asked Geoffrey, diffidently, conscious of ignorance and anxious to avoid a snub.

She frowned. "Well, yes I do, off and on, and not very well. But there it is, I do. I'm going now. Good-by."

Her smile followed quickly on her frown. She nodded to him and merged into the crowd, leav-

ing Geoffrey bewildered and a little depressed and solitary.

Three months later, when he met her at dinner at Lavinia's and Martin's house, he went up to her with the pleasant sensation of renewing an interrupted friendship.

"How do you do, Miss Guest?" he began. "I've been hoping to meet you again in some place not so crowded as the last time."

Helen looked at him coldly and directly.

"Was there a last time?" she queried.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I merely said, 'Was there a last time?'" she repeated in a nonchalant voice.

Geoffrey flushed.

"Yes," he said, very distinctly, and his look matched hers in coldness. "We met before at Lavinia's wedding, which you were not enjoying very much. You said I was very like my sister, who was pretty but not paintable, and you were wearing a green frock, very much the color of the one you've got on now. Have I produced sufficient evidence to prove that I am *not* trying the old familiar gambit of 'where have we met before'?"

He noticed that her cheeks were scarlet and that she was obviously discomfited, and it surprised

him that anyone so aggressive should be so easily routed. She stood silent for a moment, and then laughed suddenly.

"We're obviously going to quarrel," she said. "Let's do it nicely. We'll preserve a state of armed neutrality as long as we can, and when we have to abandon it we'll keep to all the rules of pretty fighting, and to begin with I'll admit that I remember you quite well at the wedding. I was only being contrary."

Geoffrey's heart leaped. There was something fresh and vital about this girl. She provoked him, but she attracted him far more. He found it immensely stimulating to be repelled by her at one moment, and in the next to be subjugated by her candid charm.

He sat opposite her at dinner, and though she talked animatedly to the man on her left, her color remained high and he knew that she was conscious of him.

He speculated hazily on the nature of her attraction for him, and decided that it was partly due to her looks, partly to her brusque inconsistency, and that undoubtedly in this strange duel which had started between them, hers was the next move. It was his rôle to wait and lurk, hers to make the attack or the appeal.

After dinner two tables for bridge were arranged, with Geoffrey at one, Helen at the other, and he did not speak to her again until, after saying good night to Lavinia, she half turned to him, bringing into play the suave clear line of chin and throat.

"I'll take you home if you like," she offered, casually. "I've got my car here."

As Geoffrey thanked her formally he felt that again she had put him at a disadvantage. He should have had a car to take her home in; but for her to take him, dropping him like a small boy at his mother's front door, was humiliating. It irked him to sit idle while she slipped into the driver's seat and pressed a green slipper ruthlessly on the starter knob. There was a moment of rending noise, then, "Better let me turn her over once or twice," Geoffrey suggested. "The engine's bound to be cold if it's been standing out here all that long time with no rug on."

"I never do put a rug on." Helen looked at him sidelong. "If you once begin pampering your car, there's no end to it."

Geoffrey burst out laughing. It reëstablished his superiority to find that she could be silly, petulant, and peevish.

"I simply don't believe you," he said through

the agonizing noise of the self-starter. "You forgot, I expect, and now you won't admit it."

At that minute the engine suddenly jumped to life, and Helen started the car with a grinding of gears and a jerk.

There was good ground for criticism, but Geoffrey held his peace, and in a moment he heard her saying: "Do you want to go straight home or would you like to come to my studio for a bit?"

Surprised, he answered promptly:

"The studio most certainly, please."

"It's a queer, untidy sort of hovel. Only a bedroom and a kitchen and a lovely big studio. I don't live there all the time, you see. In fact, my family kick against my living there at all, and I have to go home at frequent intervals. But when they get too much for me I come and live in the studio for a few weeks."

"Is the family atmosphere particularly trying, then, and is it in London?"

"No, and yes. It is in London, in Lowndes Square, and it isn't really trying at all. They're darlings, but I'm very difficult, you know."

"So I should imagine," said Geoffrey, softly, to which Helen only replied:

"Do you mind not talking? I can't cope with the traffic if I have to concentrate on you."

As they drove along the Embankment, Geoffrey twisted his body into the corner of the car, to watch her face as she drove. Even in the cold yellow light that struck over her as they approached each lamp-post, and faded so quickly as they passed it, her coloring disturbed and troubled him.

He wondered if she still had a trace of summer sunburn, or if all through the winter she kept that orange glow under her skin, so that it seemed to be lit from underneath. Concealed lighting, he thought, vaguely; and very subtle, too. Much more attractive than pink laid on, or even pink that looks as if it were the top surface; this is really orange and pink mixed, and a layer of skin over it all.

He was conscious of his hurried heart-beats and his thick, hurried breathing when he looked at the dark-red hair lying so flat on her glowing cheeks, and when for a second she turned to him, he found himself completely disconcerted.

"We're nearly there," she said. "It's painfully conventional to have a studio in Chelsea, but I couldn't find another that I liked."

She ran the car into a garage; they got out, walked along the road, and turned up a narrow

little alley at the end of which they were confronted by a blue door.

Helen fumbled with her key; the lock was stiff; impatiently she flung back her dark shawl and stooped, green-frocked and red-haired, against the bright blue background.

Geoffrey took a step forward. The juxtaposition of the three colors was intolerable to his nerves, already jangled and overstrained. His chest was aching, his ears drumming, and just as the lock yielded he caught Helen in his arms and kissed her violently and repeatedly.

Suddenly he released her and stood on the threshold, feeling cold and sick.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've been unpardonable."

"You have," she said. "Entirely. I can't imagine what happened. Anyhow, I think you'd better go now. Everything's sordid and abominable."

There was a small red mark at the side of her mouth. Geoffrey stared at it stupidly and could not find anything to say that would not sound either meaningless or offensive. Suddenly he was filled with immense pity for himself and her, and words came easily.

"I've hurt you a little," he said. "I'm sorry,

my dear, but I'm afraid we're bound to hurt each other, you and I. I never meant to kiss you; it was entirely because of the blue door and the way you stood against it. It really was too much, all that blazing blue and green and your red hair."

"What do you mean?" she asked, curiously. "You can come in for a minute if you like. I want to know what you mean when you say it was the blue door."

Geoffrey followed her into the small hall and through to a big room at the back whose long windows looked on to a paved garden. She put on the light, drew the curtains of some heavy, dark-blue stuff, and knelt down by the fire with a pair of bellows, which she used energetically till a small flame wavered up from the sullen coal.

"There!" she said, triumphantly. "That's all right. Now please talk to me about everything."

Geoffrey had stood looking at her as she coaxed the fire, but he was suddenly overwhelmed by fatigue. He sat down.

"I feel completely dull and stupid," he said, heavily. "I can't explain myself at all. I'm sorry I offended you."

"You needn't be." Helen's voice was light. "It's all right. It didn't occur to me that a mere color effect would unnerve you."

"I'm not temperamental as a rule," Geoffrey said somberly. "But I'm conscious of a painful and lovely tie between us. It wasn't only the color effect; it was dinner and the whole evening, and driving with you—a frightful strain the whole time. Listen, Helen," he leaned forward, "I've only known you for an hour or two, but do you think you could marry me sometime. It seems idiotic to say I love you, but I do. I want to marry you desperately, and do you realize that for all I know you may be engaged to some one else?"

Geoffrey broke off abruptly. He no longer felt tired; a deep exhilaration was creeping over him, and he experienced an almost savage foretaste of triumph as he said, urgently: "Helen, you will marry me, won't you?"

Helen shook her head. All the color had drained slowly from her cheeks, and the little mark beside her mouth stood out hot and scarlet. She put a finger up to it and felt it gently.

"No," she answered, "I won't marry you, Geoffrey. There is a queer link between us—I felt it the first minute we met—but I won't marry you, at least not now. I might in ten years if my work fails me, but not now. You see it *is* important to me. I love it and I feel I'm going to do some-

thing good, and whatever anyone may say, I'm certain it's impossible to work decently and be married as well."

"I don't believe it is," said Geoffrey, strongly. "Frankly, I've never thought about it, but I'm perfectly sure we could do it."

"No, we couldn't. No one can."

"Helen, you must marry me. It seems to me utterly impossible that you should refuse to. And that's not conceit; it's simply that I know we ought to be together, you and I."

Helen smiled a little wanly.

"I didn't think it was conceit, and if I could marry anyone it would be you; but I can't, don't you see? It would be like walking into a cage, and with my eyes open, too. The minute I got in and heard the doors shut on me I'd go mad with terror till I got out again."

"You're wrong. It wouldn't be like that, not with us, Helen."

"It would. Look at us now, Geoffrey. A minute ago you were nearly dead with weariness and I was bursting with vitality, and now I'm nearly dead and you're alive again."

"My love, that only shows. Of course, now, as things are, we fight each other and exhaust each other, but if we were married it wouldn't be like

this; we'd both be quite admirably stimulated all the time."

"No, we shouldn't." Helen shook her head again. "One of us would be completely on top, and the other would have to give up everything, and I might easily be the other!"

"That's not fair. I don't want you to give up anything. I only want you to marry me."

"That's just it, and it's no good." Helen looked at him levelly. "I'll be your mistress, Geoffrey. At least I think I will; not now, I mean"—she looked fearfully round the room as if the shadows might hear and bear witness against her—"but sometime I think I will be. Anyhow, I won't marry anyone but you ever, and you must leave it at that."

"My sweet"—Geoffrey knelt by her chair and held her against him—"I don't want a mistress, and certainly not you. I want you to marry me, and you will some day, won't you? I can wait."

Helen freed herself and sat bolt upright.

"I love you in a way, Geoffrey, but don't begin being good to me. I hate people who are good to me. If you stop fighting me altogether, I'll simply trample on you. I'd hate you to try and bully me, but I'd hate you still more to be kind to me."

"I'm not a very kind person," said Geoffrey, soberly. "At home I'm supposed to be moody and difficult—like you, I suppose—and Hugh is much more charming and likable."

"That'll do very well, then. I like this feeling of half loving you and with the other half being antipathetic to you."

"I don't like it. It's hell unless you'll marry me. Listen, Helen, if we made a treaty with conditions so that your work was protected, don't you think you could bring yourself to it then?"

"I might. I don't want to; it's against my better judgment and I'd be a bad wife, but I might. Tell me what conditions you'd suggest. For one thing, there's children."

"I don't see that that matters. Don't have them if you don't want them."

"Wouldn't you mind?"

"No, not a bit—now, anyhow. And if I wanted one in ten years or so perhaps you might consider it."

"Geoffrey, I almost think we might manage," Helen said, eagerly. "I've always ruled out marriage, and I won't do it at once, anyhow, but if we really did make a sort of treaty that would safeguard my painting, then perhaps in two or three years I'd marry you."

"I'll work out the clauses. You'll have to be protected against me, and against children, and against my relations and heaps of others."

"Then why do you want me at all?" Helen asked in a small voice.

"I do. I want you most painfully. I hate your work in a way because it comes between us, but it's part of you, too, and I don't know you well enough to disassociate bits of you from other bits."

"Don't hate it, Geoffrey. It's the most important part of me. I've not done anything to matter yet, but I'll show you my last thing if you like. I had an idea that all this talk about schools and styles was nonsense and that one could paint in two distinct styles in one picture and still keep the unity."

She went over and lifted a canvas that was turned against the wall.

"It's not framed," she said, "so I'll hold it up against these curtains; they're a good background."

She held it at arm's-length, standing very straight and tall, the outstretched arm and hand trembling a little with its weight.

Two white ponies were coming through a wood, with a violent sun striking between the trees. Each tree was painted as a solemn dark column with

four twisting branches on each of which hung four formal emerald leaves. But the ponies were round and fat, with flowing manes and tails and little hoofs uplifted. There was a classical rotundity about their haunches; their necks were thick and curved.

Geoffrey looked at them and thought how much happier they would have been frolicking in some flowery glade or prancing round a little copse with a white temple in the center. Against these stark blue-brown trees they became fantastic; the wood seemed real and permanent, the ponies—ironically robust—were creatures of an hour, a fashion, a convention.

"It's unkind to the ponies," he said, turning to Helen. "They're wretched in that wood. They want to caper in a nice little meadow full of daisies and buttercups."

"Daisies and buttercups," repeated Helen, broodingly. "Yes, I suppose they do. Anyhow, it's no good at all. I thought I had discovered something when I began, but halfway through I lost my idea. That's why I haven't finished it. Perhaps, after all, I'll marry you and have a red-plush dining-room and hang that over the mantelpiece."

Her voice was sullen, her face pinched and

plain. Geoffrey was conscious of a profound and weary melancholy settling on his spirits. He looked at Helen, who returned his look suspiciously, like a stranger. Their marriage seemed remote and improbable.

Vaguely he contemplated kissing her, but the effort was too great in his dazed and empty state.

"I'll ring up," he said, disjointedly. "I must go now. Or I'll come and see you. Perhaps Sunday would do. Would it? Anyhow, I must go now. I'm so tired I don't know what I'm saying."

"Yes, come on Sunday. I'll give you some supper. And don't even mention my name to anyone. I don't know yet what I'm going to do about you."

Her tone was withdrawn and hostile; it matched her suspicious glance.

"Good night, Helen," said Geoffrey, wearily, and the blue door shut behind him as she said, "Good night, Geoffrey Greene."

II

Six months of alternating ecstasy and despair, with a persistent undercurrent of nervous fatigue, so wrought upon Geoffrey's healthy frame that when he caught influenza in the spring of 1924

he was seriously ill and convalescence was long and difficult.

The day before he took ill, when he was feeling particularly low and inadequate, Helen had come to a serious and, she proclaimed, a final decision. It coincided with a change in her method of painting. She had abandoned the genre of conventional subjects placed in a futurist setting, of which her two white ponies was the last example, and had turned instead to poster-painting. After some months of very hard work she had succeeded with a design which, momentarily at least, satisfied her exacting standards.

It was austere in line but richly heraldic in coloring, and when she stepped back to look at the finished work, she decided in one and the same moment that it was good and that she would now have to eliminate Geoffrey from her scheme of life.

Her reasons were obscure. The thought of doing without him brought with it a faint shock of surprise and pain, but, standing there in front of her own work, it seemed to her impossible to reconcile anything so simple, so vigorous, and so disciplined, with her passionate and confused love for Geoffrey. Her painting was clear and strenuous; it brought her a few moments of ease, fol-

lowed always by dissatisfaction and renewed efforts, which in their turn brought her again to a period of content.

But there was no such rhythm in her emotional life. She loved Geoffrey; at moments she desired him, and was impatient of the scruples which constrained him to refuse her as a mistress; at moments she was conscious of a surge of tenderness for him which made the thought of marriage almost attractive. Often, however, she felt a strong revulsion against him, not only as an individual, but as an interloper in her private life who interfered with her peace of mind and destroyed her powers of concentration. The only constant factor in their relationship was her savage determination to protect her work against him. This determination showed itself in a frank and laughing hostility when she was painting well, and in sullen resentment when she was painting badly.

As she looked at the completed poster, Helen sighed. Geoffrey must go, and the sooner the better. It could not fail to be painful to both of them, but she must feel free again. She must disentangle herself from emotional disruptions and reactions.

She rang him up at his office, and left a mes-

sage asking him to call in the evening, then flung herself down in a big chair, her hands folded idly in her lap and an expression of weary disenchantment on her face.

Her thoughts depressed her. She realized that, apart from all sentimental pangs, she would miss Geoffrey as an irritant. Already she felt listless and uninspired at the thought of doing without him. He stimulated her; she was goaded to work by the desire to justify herself for her refusal to marry him. Even in her painting she was beginning to rely on him; a state of dependence was almost established.

She got up impatiently and looked at her watch. It was only four o'clock and there was no possibility of Geoffrey being with her for at least two hours.

Tearing off her painting overall, she went through to her bedroom, where she slipped on a frock of brick-red crêpe de Chine that stole the color from her cheeks and dulled her hair to brown. She caught sight of herself in the mirror and told herself defiantly that at times Helen Guest could look very plain, but when she had put on a dark coat and a small dark hat, she carefully arranged her hair in an exact semicircle

on either cheek, and brushed a little rouge over her cheek bones.

The studio seemed unfriendly as she went through. The ashes were cold in the grate; the sun lit up a layer of soft dust over the furniture; a curtain had torn away from one of its rings and dropped a little.

Helen decided impatiently that when she had finally broken with Geoffrey it would probably be better to go home for a time and shut up the studio. A few weeks in Lowndes Square would effectively drive her to work again.

In the meantime I'll go and see Lavinia, she decided; she's a soothing little thing, and the sight of her house all so smug and correct will reinforce me against Geoffrey. It's the sort of house and life I'd fall into if I were such a fool as to marry him.

She shrugged at her own weakness in needing reinforcements, and set out briskly for Lavinia's house in Catherine Street.

It happened that Mrs. Rodney Greene was having tea with her daughter when Helen was announced.

Lavinia greeted Helen affectionately and turned to her mother.

"I don't think you've met Helen, mother dear,"

she said. "Unless perhaps for a moment at the wedding, but that hardly counts."

"No, I don't think I have," answered Mrs. Rodney. "But I know you're a relation of Martin's, Miss Guest. I've often heard both him and Lavinia talking of your work. You paint, don't you?"

Her voice was pleasant, but her eye raked Helen from her long legs to the jaunty little hat that covered her eyebrows, and it registered unmistakable disapproval.

"I've just finished a thing today, but I feel I'll never paint again," said Helen, and though her voice was low there was a violence behind the words that struck unpleasantly on Mrs. Rodney's ears.

"Oh, but surely you won't give up like that," she began, persuasively. "Of course I can understand artistic discouragement, the finished work falling so far short of the ideal"—she sketched a vague gesture in the air—"but still I'm sure you should persevere."

She looked brightly and expectantly at Helen, but her glib words of consolation fell on a grim silence. Helen lay back wearily in her chair, hardly seeming to hear what was said, and it was Lavinia who answered, rather awkwardly: "Helen

paints beautifully, mother. She did a picture of some ponies a little while ago that you would simply love."

"Oh, Lavinia, that thing's no good at all!" said Helen, impatiently. "It's absolutely wrong; the idea was wrong to begin with, and then I didn't even carry it out properly. What I'm doing now is quite different." She leaned forward, eager and unself-conscious, "I think I've discovered at last what I want to do; not impressionistic at all! purely decorative and very severe and simple. I really believe it's a style I can express myself in."

She caught Mrs. Rodney's blank expression and relapsed into silence.

"Well, I'm glad to know you're not really giving it up," said Mrs. Rodney, kindly. "But now I must be going, Lavinia dear. I've got some shopping to do on the way home." Mrs. Greene stood up. "Good-by, Miss Guest," she said. "Perhaps Lavinia will bring you to tea with me one day. I should enjoy a little talk about art."

Helen winced visibly, but her voice was polite and noncommittal as she said: "Thank you, Mrs. Greene. It's very good of you. Good-by."

"Do you mind if I go down with mother? I won't be a minute," asked Lavinia.

She left the room, forgetting to close the door,

and presently Mrs. Rodney's clear voice floated up from the hall.

"Well, come and see us soon, darling, won't you? And tell me, do you see much of that Miss Guest? I think she's a very exaggerated young woman and her manner struck me as most unfortunate."

"We like her very much," Lavinia answered, simply, "and she's awfully clever."

"I must say I don't think mere cleverness is enough to excuse such brusque behavior. Good-by, dear. Take care of yourself."

The front door closed and Lavinia came upstairs and into the drawing-room.

Helen looked at her and laughed.

"I'm glad you like me," she said. "But your mother's perfectly right. I'm not nearly clever enough to justify my brusque behavior, and from her point of view my manner is undoubtedly unfortunate."

Lavinia flushed. "I'm sorry you heard," she said. "Mother's very critical, but she would like you if she knew you properly."

"No she wouldn't. It's inconceivable that she should ever like me. Not in a thousand years. But I'm sorry I burst in on you and her like that. I was in a bad mood and thought I'd come and

look at you and your house and profit by its example."

"How do you mean?"

"I don't mean anything at all nice, so let's leave it at that. You're looking very pretty, Lavinia; the baby hasn't even begun to spoil your looks yet."

"It will soon, I'm afraid. I look horribly black under the eyes in the morning; I only begin to get human about midday."

"You really are extremely like Geoffrey." Helen spoke abruptly. "Lavinia, do you know I've been treating him abominably?"

"No, I didn't know that. I'm sorry. Geoffrey is a dear, really. I'm awfully fond of him."

"So am I. I love him in a way, but I can't marry him. I can't face being stuck down in a little house and having to run it and be amiable at breakfast, and welcome my husband's friends and be polite to his relations. I simply can't do it."

"Can't you really, Helen? Geoffrey hasn't told me anything about it, but I know he's been miserable about something for months, and I did just think once, from something he said, that it might be because of you."

"Well, it's no good, anyhow. I'm not going

to see him any more after this evening. I do think anything's better than dragging on like this."

"You know, Helen, I honestly think you wouldn't find it so very difficult to be married. You'd be quite rich. You've got some money of your own, and Geoffrey isn't doing too badly—he went into the business very young—so you could have decent maids who would run the house for you. It makes all the difference if you have enough money not to have to bother."

"Lavinia, your cynical outlook surprises me. But you see it isn't only things like that. It's Geoffrey. Loving him would get so frightfully in the way of my work. I don't believe it's possible to reconcile everything satisfactorily."

She shut her mouth obstinately and Lavinia sighed.

"I really am sorry," she said. "I think you could be perfectly happy, you two; and of course I'd love it from my own point of view, so perhaps I'm prejudiced; but still I do think it's possible."

"It isn't, Lavinia. Don't let's talk about it any more. I must go now. I'm going to shut up the studio for a bit. Come and see me at home. Mother would love you. She thinks my friends are apt to be a little erratic, and you'd

be a welcome change. Good-by and thanks. Don't come down."

As Helen walked home she was racked with uncertainty. Lavinia had shaken instead of strengthening her decision, but nothing of this showed in her manner as she greeted Geoffrey a little later. He looked pale and ill, and when she said, "Sit down and be a little comfortable," he only shook his head, looked at her dumbly, and remained leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Geoffrey dear," she said, "I've been thinking and worrying about us, and I've come to the conclusion that we simply mustn't see each other any more. I'm sorry; I'm sorry for myself, and I'm sorry for you, but it's no good."

"You can't suddenly decide a thing like that. It isn't fair," said Geoffrey; but he spoke without conviction.

"I *have* decided," she answered. "There's no use going over the same old ground; don't let's discuss it again. I'm going home for a bit, and I don't know whether I'll come back to this studio or not, so there's no reason why we should meet, ever, if we're reasonably careful to avoid each other. Good-by, Geoffrey. I'd like you to go now."

She spoke coldly; her plans seemed to be cut

and dried; and there was a finality about her words that rang in Geoffrey's aching head.

"All right," he said. "I'll go now. Good-by."

Left alone, Helen began to pack a suitcase. As she threw in coats, shoes, and frocks, tears streamed steadily down her cheeks. Mechanically she powdered her nose, locked the studio, got out her car, and drove to Lowndes Square, where she learned that her father and mother were away for the week-end and her sister out to dinner.

"I can easily get you something to eat, Miss Helen, and your room will be ready in a moment," said the parlormaid, pleasantly, accustomed to Helen's sudden arrivals and equally sudden departures.

"I don't want any dinner, thanks. I'll have a hot bath and go straight to bed, and I'd like a bowl of bread and milk in bed—lots of sugar and no crusts."

"Very well, Miss Helen."

The maid disappeared with her case as Helen went into the library to find a book before following her upstairs. She slept heavily for twelve hours, and wakened to a mood of discouragement and lethargy. Life seemed meaningless. The thought of painting did not attract her. She had

no particular engagements. There was nothing to do.

Mr. and Mrs. Guest, returning in the evening, were pleased to find her in the library, sitting with her hands idle in her lap; but her depression persisted and she answered her mother's questions with curt monosyllables.

"Yes, I'm all right thanks. No, nothing's wrong. Really, mother, I'm all right. I know I look tired; I've been working very hard; but please just leave me alone."

In the weeks that followed she was forced to repeat very often her plea to be left alone. Her family was used to the sight of Helen working. Helen idle and empty-handed was, however, so unusual a phenomenon that they made unceasing efforts to interest her in their varying occupations, and she as unceasingly spurned them.

A month went past during which she had not lifted a brush, and she was in her sitting-room one afternoon, wondering dismally if she would ever be caught by the desire to paint, when Lavinia was announced.

Helen jumped to her feet.

"Do come in, Lavinia. I'm nearly mad with mooning about doing nothing."

"But haven't you been painting?" Lavinia asked,

a little maliciously. "I thought you'd given up Geoffrey so as to be able to paint."

Helen spread out her hands.

"I haven't done a thing;" she said, "not a single thing; and what's more I don't know whether I ever shall or not. Sit down and talk to me, Lavinia."

"I can't," said Lavinia. "I'm on my way to Geoffrey now, and I thought it just possible that you would like to come with me. You know he's been ill."

"I haven't heard a thing about him. Tell me, is he really ill? What's wrong with him? I'll come with you at once."

"He's had influenza very badly. He was starting it that day you came to tea with me when mother was there. He went home that night very seedy and he's really been pretty bad. He's much better now, but he's still in bed, and mother's going to be out this afternoon, so she rang me up to go and amuse him, and I thought perhaps you'd come, too."

"He may not want to see me," said Helen.

"He does; I asked him," answered Lavinia, coolly.

Helen's cheeks were glowing, her eyes shining.

"I'll go and change. Wait here for me. I won't be long," she said, imperiously.

"No, I think I'll go on now and you can follow when you're ready," suggested Lavinia.

Helen caught her hand.

"Please, no," she said. "Please wait. I don't want to go alone. I'd rather go with you."

"You're shy," said Lavinia, accusingly.

Helen was defiant and happy.

"And what if I am?" she said. "I'm going to ask Geoffrey to marry me, and I'd rather have a chaperon there to make it more seemly. Wait here for me."

She rushed upstairs to dress, and came down in the green frock and hat that she had worn to Lavinia's wedding.

"Look!" she said. "Sheer sentiment made me put this on."

Lavinia looked at her standing in the doorway tall and upright, the rich green of her frock bringing out all the color in her hair and skin.

"You're lovely," she said, impulsively. "Really lovely. No wonder Geoffrey's quite mad about you."

"Is he?" asked Helen. "I do hope he is; I want him to be. You really think, then, I needn't be nervous as to whether he'll accept me or not?"

She laughed. "Come on, Lavinia," she said. "I can't wait. I've had nothing for a month—neither my painting nor Geoffrey—and evidently I can't have one without the other, so even if they fight I'll have to have both."

Suddenly her face sobered.

"It'll be a cat-and-dog life—everything I meant it not to be—but, damn it! I can't help it; I can't do without him."

III

If Mrs. Greene was distressed by her son's engagement, she concealed it perfectly after the first moment, when, opening the door of Geoffrey's bedroom, she was affronted by the sight of a young woman, almost a stranger to her, sitting on the floor beside Geoffrey's bed, one arm round his neck, a long leg sprawling, her little green hat tossed on the hearth rug.

As Edith Greene stood in the doorway her thoughts were bitter, her expression bleak; but with undeniable gallantry she bowed to the inevitable, twisted her face into a semblance of happy surprise, and, coming forward, took Helen's hands as she scrambled to her feet.

"My dears," she said, "this is very unexpected.

I didn't even know you knew Miss Guest, Geoffrey. But I mustn't call you Miss Guest any longer it's Helen, isn't it, dear?" She smiled kindly, sat down on the edge of Geoffrey's bed, and said, "Now tell me all about it."

It was a magnificent recovery. Geoffrey looked guilty and miserable, but Helen was filled with admiration. She stood up, tall and unembarrassed, and leaning against the mantelpiece explained the situation in her quiet voice:

"We really owe you an apology, Mrs. Greene. Of course you must think it quite unseemly for me to be here like this, when I've never been in your house before, but everything has happened very suddenly. It's even been a surprise to us. Hasn't it, darling?"

She turned to Geoffrey, and Mrs. Greene's start of annoyance at the last word was unnoticed.

"Geoffrey asked me to marry him a long time ago," she went on. "I wouldn't, for several reasons, chiefly my work. Then only today I suddenly changed my mind and came to tell him so. At least, Lavinia brought me."

"You actually proposed to Helen a long time ago, Geoffrey dear, and yet you've never even mentioned her name to me?"

The playful reproach in Mrs. Greene's voice

hid successfully the raging resentment in her heart, but before Geoffrey could answer, Helen broke in.

"That was entirely my fault. I felt so uncertain and wretched that the whole thing had to be kept absolutely private."

"Even from Geoffrey's mother?" asked Mrs. Greene, gently.

In the fading light Helen's young face looked stern, but she, too, spoke gently:

"Yes even from you, I'm afraid. It was so vitally important to both of us that whichever way it had turned, whether we decided to marry or not to marry, we simply couldn't afford to let in any outside influence."

"I see," said Mrs. Greene, slowly. "I've never really thought of myself as 'an outside influence.' My one desire has always been for my children's happiness. That's what comes first with me and always will. Geoffrey knows that; you'll learn it too, dear."

Geoffrey had caught the undertone of acidity that betrayed her real feelings, and he made an effort to placate her.

"You really are amazing, mother," he said. "I know it must be a shock to you, but, as Helen says, it's a shock to us, too."

She bent and kissed him.

"My dear Geoffrey," she said, "I'm sure time will prove it to be a pleasant shock, not the reverse; I'm only too glad to have another little daughter."

Geoffrey grinned and said, tactlessly:

"Not really a little one, mother. Helen's quite a bit taller than you are."

Mrs. Greene's armor cracked.

"Don't be silly," she said, sharply. "You know quite well I wasn't referring to her size."

Putting a hand on his brow, she regained her poise.

"You're quite tired out," she said. "*Such* a hot head. Now, Helen, I'm going to give you only five minutes, and then you must come downstairs and let Geoffrey rest. Come to the drawing-room, will you, and have a little chat before you go?"

"Thank you, I will," said Helen, opening the door for Mrs. Greene, who turned her head to smile tenderly at Geoffrey, gave Helen's shoulder a little pat, sighed, and left the room.

IV

If Helen was secretly disgusted by all the elaborate preparations for her wedding, she disguised her feelings with considerable skill, and

took part, quite naturally, in endless discussions on trousseau, red carpets, and white satin. Both her mother and Geoffrey's mother were delighted at her unlooked-for docility, and Mrs. Guest admitted quite frankly to Mrs. Greene that Helen's engagement was having a very settling effect on her; to which Mrs. Greene replied, firmly:

"Dear Helen. We all expect so much of her that I'm sure it makes her try to live up to our ideals."

There was a slight uneasiness in the air on the evening when Mrs. Greene asked, brightly:

"And where are you two thinking of going for your honeymoon?"

Helen looked up from some patterns of shot silk that she was considering.

"Oh, The Hague, I think," she said, casually. "There are some moderns there that I rather want to see, and some quite good old stuff, too, I believe."

"Oh, really? Yes, that would be very nice, I suppose. But of course it's a big town. Don't you think Geoffrey would be happier among beautiful scenery? The Italian lakes, perhaps, or mountains, if you want to be energetic."

"I don't know, I'm sure." Helen shrugged her

shoulders. "Would you be happier with scenery, Geoffrey?"

"I think I'd like The Hague," he said. "For a week or so, anyhow, and then we can move on."

"You know, dear," said Mrs. Greene, reasonably, "your interest in pictures is a very specialized thing. You mustn't expect Geoffrey to feel quite as you do about them. I don't think he knows very much about art."

Helen's face was grim.

"He doesn't," she answered, "but he'll learn." And her mouth shut ominously.

Mrs. Greene got up discreetly and, murmuring something about dressing for dinner, went upstairs.

"Darling," said Geoffrey, "mother thinks we are now about to quarrel fiercely; but we aren't, are we?"

"Of course not. I don't mind your not knowing anything about painting so long as you don't mind my concentrating on it a good deal."

"You know I don't. Tell me, Helen, is all this business driving you to frenzy?"

"No, not a bit. I think it's frightfully obscene, dressing up in white satin and being handed over to you at a given moment, but I can easily cope with it. Isn't there something about 'straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel'?"

"And I'm the camel," said Geoffrey, sullenly.

"Yes, you are," Helen answered, calmly. "And you understand the position perfectly well. You know I am marrying you quite reluctantly for the simple reason that I love you to distraction."

Geoffrey's face cleared.

"I am a fool," he said. "It's quite all right, Helen, and you're being marvelously good about all this sickening detail."

Helen shook her head.

"It's your mother who's marvelous," she said. "She really is a masterpiece. I've never seen anything so well done as her pose. She is so affectionate and maternal that anyone would think she was delighted with me. In fact, she's almost coy, and yet she can't help disapproving of almost everything I say or do."

"No, that isn't true; she's approved of you quite a lot lately."

"Oh, well, perhaps she has; but only because I have given way about all sorts of conventional details that go quite against the grain with me."

"Why have you, darling?" Geoffrey asked, curiously.

"Well, she swallowed me so magnificently in the first place that I felt I had to help to bolster up her attitude. It would be rather pathetic, really,

if she knew we understood her so well. She is a person who needs to be wrapped in the illusion of success."

"It's kind of you to feel like that, I think, though it would kill her to realize that you knew so much about her that you were simply being decent to her."

"Anyhow, it's only a few more weeks now."

"Six weeks and three days, my dearest, and after that we won't see much of them and everything will go quite smoothly."

"Oh no, it won't, Geoffrey." Helen's eyes flickered dangerously. "It won't go the least smoothly; it will be up and down like a very rough crossing, but perfectly lovely all the same."

"Dear heart, I'm sure of that. If only I can keep you happy."

"You needn't have any doubts, Geoffrey. I'm perfectly certain that fundamentally we're right for each other."

The next few years proved the truth of Helen's words. Their honeymoon was exhausting, awkward, and ecstatic, but not, they decided, more exhausting and awkward than other people's honeymoons, and, on the other hand, certainly more ecstatic.

"It's odd how you stimulate me mentally,"

said Helen a little while after they got home to the house in Cheyne Walk which Mrs. Rodney so often referred to as "very bright, of course, but rather too bizarre for my taste."

"I don't think it is odd," contradicted Geoffrey. "Ever since we met we've acted as mutual goads to each other."

"Yes, I know," Helen answered, impatiently, "but it was different before we were married. Really, you know, I didn't do any decent work between getting to know you and now. You remember that poster I was so pleased with? Well, it's quite awful. I was on the wrong tack altogether, but now I do know what I'm about; I entirely understand about the unity of curves."

"You don't suggest, do you, that I'm responsible for enlarging your comprehension of curves?" asked Geoffrey, laughing.

"No, of course not; you hadn't anything to do with it. I only mean that I'm very clear and free in my mind just now, and that is partly because of you. You don't hinder me at all; you help me."

"I'm glad," said Geoffrey. "Keep free if you can; there's no need to get in a mess with things."

"I certainly won't." Helen was emphatic. "I know your wretched aunt and all sorts of people

expect to be asked here just because I'm newly-married and have a new house, but I simply won't do it. And I'm not going to pay any calls, either."

"I don't want you to do things like that. Lavinia does it plenty enough for one family, and Hugh's wife, when he has one, is sure to be a model of propriety. But I do want you to go on being Helen Guest even if you are Mrs. Geoffrey Greene. Don't fuss about my family."

"You do understand remarkably well, Geoffrey. I'd have to go my own way in any case, but I'm terribly glad you're with me in my policy of being ruthless."

By means of keeping to this policy of ruthlessness life went happily for the young Geoffrey Greenes. There was a period of stress and strain in the second year of their marriage when Helen decided that a frankly futurist style was the only one in which she could express herself sincerely. Her first attempts were almost ludicrously unsuccessful, and Geoffrey was so rash as to burst out laughing as he looked at a canvas in which a large purple cylinder placed on a still larger purple cylinder, and surmounted by a smaller cylinder of shrimp pink faintly spotted, was entitled simply "Country Woman."

Helen looked at him coldly.

"Aren't you being a little crude, Geoffrey?" she asked.

"Don't mislay your sense of humor, I do implore you," he urged, still laughing. "I expect this is a very important picture, but to the uninitiated eye it's very funny."

"That's just the trouble, Geoffrey. You *are* uninitiated, almost painfully so. I've been feeling out of sympathy with you for some time. I'm prepared to agree with you that this is bad work, though the idea is perfectly sound, but I think it's bad because of you. I'm being clogged by marriage; it's hampering me appallingly."

"You're working yourself up, Helen," said Geoffrey, curtly. "I refuse to be made responsible because you do bad work."

"I'm sorry," Helen's voice was hard. "But the fact remains that indirectly you are responsible. Marriage is not conducive to good work, and I've decided to cut it out—for a time anyhow. I'm quite contented to go on living in this house if you will arrange to sleep in your dressing-room and leave me entirely unmolested."

"You're unpardonable. I don't know how you dare to use a word like that about me."

"I'll apologize for it if you like; it wasn't the

word I meant. But I wish to be quite free and not be expected to sleep with you again."

"Certainly," Geoffrey agreed, stiffly. "That is for you to decide."

Their reconciliation a few weeks later was disproportionately trivial. Helen's futurist fever had burned itself out and she was temporarily high and dry, without any interest in art.

Geoffrey came into her studio one night to find her looking ruefully at "Country Woman." She went up to him and kissed him.

"I've been a bloody fool, Geoffrey darling. I'm terribly sorry. You were quite right; it really is a ghastly picture. Let's burn it now."

"You've been awful," said Geoffrey, but his voice was kind.

"I know I have, but I swear I never will again. Come on and let's burn it."

Childishly they cut the canvas into strips, crumpled it up, and crammed it into the fire, and as Helen quoted, happily, 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out,' the last traces of Geoffrey's resentment melted and he held her to him with a passion intensified by the past weeks of restraint.

No quarrel marked the end of her next phase, which had been a return to the impressionist style of her pre-marriage period.

"It's no good," she proclaimed, dismally. "I'm doing rotten work."

"I hope you're not going to blame me and marriage this time?" asked Geoffrey, with a faint accent of anxiety under his light manner.

Helen smiled at him frankly.

"Good God, no!" she said. "I know better now. I've got you perfectly in place, Geoffrey. You're the one absolutely necessary thing in my life that I shall probably always stick to. All this stuff"—she waved an airy hand round the studio —"is variable, if you know what I mean. I can't do without it, but it changes. Heaven knows it's bad enough now, but sometime I'm going to do something good."

"Do you mean you've arranged your life in compartments, with me in one and your painting in another, and so on?"

"No, I don't mean that. I did try it at one time, but it was hopeless. When I got mad with my painting, my rage overlapped out of the painting compartment into yours. But now it's different: you're separate from everything and yet at the bottom of everything. I can't explain quite what I mean, but it works all right."

"Darling, do you mean that in your mind I'm

independent of the other things that you care about, but in a way they are dependent on me?"

"Yes, I think that's it. Anyhow, I'm happy."

"So am I, Helen, really frightfully happy."

"And what's more, Geoffrey, I think I'll probably be able to fit a child in, too."

"Do you mean that you want one? Don't do it for me. I'm perfectly satisfied with things as they are."

Helen came over and sat beside Geoffrey on the sofa, leaning back in her corner and gazing at the fire. She was silent for a few moments, and Geoffrey, looking at the firelight playing over her bright hair, wondered vaguely what she was thinking.

"I don't think I specially want one," she said at last; "at least if I do it's for pure idiotic sentimental reasons. But on the other hand, I'm not sure that I won't paint better after I've had one. You can't be certain, really, that every possible experience isn't all to the good."

"I think probably it is," agreed Geoffrey. "Of course I like you to want one for idiotic sentimental reasons—it makes me feel surer of you; but quite apart from that there is your painting. I know you're depressed about it just now, and it

might start you off working again if you had a child."

"Geoffrey, you're rather sweet to me," said Helen, impulsively. "I think it's touching of you to understand that having a baby might make me paint better. It's a topsy-turvy idea, I know, but I can't help seeing it that way."

"Sometime I suppose you'll get used to my being able to see things from your point of view," said Geoffrey, contentedly.

Helen lifted his hand and kissed it.

"I don't think I'll get too used to you, darling," she said. "I really love you very much."

The telephone rang in the hall before Geoffrey could answer her.

"Damn!" she said, getting up lazily. "I'm sure that's your mother. She always rings up at this time of night because she feels sure of getting us both at once."

She shut the door, and the one-sided conversation was too subdued to interrupt Geoffrey's thoughts. They were entirely pleasant. His marriage satisfied him mentally and delighted him physically. His occasional fierce quarrels with Helen seemed mere surface disturbances; they did not affect in the slightest their mutual love, though

they undoubtedly eradicated in Geoffrey any tendency towards complacency.

He lay stretched out luxuriously on the sofa, and, looking back, found that the storms and agonies that had preceded his engagement were dim in his memory. They belonged to a stage that was definitely over.

Helen came back to the studio, her eyes dancing.

"You needn't tell me," said Geoffrey. "I can see by your face that you've been talking to mother. What's she done now?"

"Oh, Geoffrey, it really is gorgeous! She's got the most perfect idea. You know Hugh and Jessica are coming back on Tuesday? Well, she proposes to have a party the Friday after, for your Grannie and Greataunt Sarah and Aunt Dora and Jessica and me. All six of us, do you see? And such husbands as there are, naturally."

"It sounds monstrous. Must we go?"

"Of course we must! And it isn't monstrous at all. I do wish you appreciated your mother. She'll be at her best stage-managing a thing like that. It will be a perfect puppet show—she'll pull the wires and we'll dance."

"Darling, why do you dance? Is it pure malice?"

"No, it isn't. A little bit, yes. I do love to see how far she'll go. When we talk about art, for instance, I give her cues to see if she'll take them, and she does every time. Out she trots the same old *clichés;* it never fails. But mostly it's because I really admire her: she's so consistently unreal, she isn't a person at all, she's a peg hung with old worn-out conventions and traditions, and yet she comports herself as if she were more real than anyone else in the world."

"I'm her son. Am I unreal, too?" Geoffrey asked, soberly.

"My darling, you're not."

Helen stood away from him, looking down at him serenely, her hands clasped loosely in front of her, her manner serious.

"You're real to me, just as I expect she and your father are real to each other. I'm an individualist; I suppose I'm what people would call temperamental, but I'm not entirely imbecile. I appreciate quite clearly that I have an enormous lot in common with your mother. As regards the ordinary practical things of life, we do just the same as your parents did. I don't mean only things like marrying, and having children, and dying. But we're the product of the same education and very much the same kind of home.

We have the same income, and move in much the same set. The differences between us are mainly superficial and illusionary. Your mother, for instance, has an illusion about motherhood and all that, and I have one about art, but we're both in the tradition of suitable wives for the male Greene."

"It *is* odd to hear you talk like that. I should think that you would have passionately repudiated any sort of kinship with mother. And surely the differences between people are very sharp? Whatever you may say, you're very distinct from other people."

"Not now," said Helen, positively. "When I was very young, yes, and when I'm old then I'll be Helen Guest again, but now I'm just beginning on the middle years and your mother's just getting to the end of them, and we've all the experiences of life in common, even if we do approach them from a totally different standpoint."

"I see what you mean. But you won't change, will you, Helen? You won't be less yourself if you have a baby?"

"Yes, I think I will change. I don't think I'll be less myself, but, anyhow, you'll have to risk that."

"I don't want you any different," said Geoffrey, very quietly.

Helen threw back her head and laughed.

"You don't know," she said. "I may become too awful, or I may improve enormously; the only single certain thing is that within the next year or two I'm going to do some good work."

"You're like mother in one way, anyhow—in your brutally uncompromising optimism."

"And in another way, too," Helen countered, swiftly, "that I do most genuinely love one of the Mr. Greenes."

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. Hugh Beckett Greene

I

JESSICA DEANE wakened very early on her wedding morning and got up at once to look at the weather. The sun was slowly climbing up a clear sky, and there was a cold frostiness in the air that matched her mood. She looked out westwards over the roofs in the direction of the Greene's house, and wondered whether Hugh were asleep or awake, and if awake whether he were feeling like her, keenly strung up and exquisitely expectant, or only nervous and worried at the thought of dressing up to face a crowded church and a still more crowded reception.

She crossed over to the long mirror and studied her face at close range. It would be awful to have a spot on my chin, she thought, anxiously; even the smallest beginning of a spot would spoil my nerve, or a bloodshot eye, or hiccups at the last

minute. What appalling things might happen to destroy me today.

The mirror faithfully reflected back her own expression of dismay as she thought of all the depressing contingencies that might arise, and as she looked at it her face broke into a smile. Satisfied that even a close scrutiny showed no blemish, she stepped back a pace and looked at herself in detail.

My hair grows well, she thought, dispassionately. I'm glad it's so fair and goes back like that off my forehead, but I think my eyes are too wide apart, and really my chin is almost negligible, it fades away to nothing. In fact, twenty years ago I would have been plain; it's pure luck that my kind of face happens to be in the mode at present. It's lucky, too, that Hugh is so dark; we ought to look nice together.

Her mind plunged forward a few hours, and she laid a nervous hand on her heart beating so lightly and quickly under the lace of her nightgown, as she thought of herself and Hugh standing at the flowered altar with rows and rows of massed curious faces behind.

Seized by a sudden desire to reassure herself by a sight of her wedding frock, Jessica went quietly into the spare bedroom, where frock, train,

and veil were spread out on the bed. She lifted the white sheet that protected them and looked at the shining gold tissue of frock and train, and the old-ivory veil lent by her godmother; then suddenly picking them up, she bore them off to her room.

Of course it's desperately unlucky to try on your frock when it's quite finished, she argued with herself, but Hugh and I don't need luck and I'm not superstitious, and I would terribly like to make sure that it's as nice as I think it is.

Taking off her nightgown, she put on a new vest of yellow silk to match the frock, gold stockings, and the pointed gold shoes that were to carry her up the aisle as Jessica Deane and down again as Jessica Greene.

Just as she slipped the frock over her head and struggled into the long, close-fitting sleeves, a voice from the doorway said. "Darling, are you mad? I heard you bumping about and thought I'd better come and see if you were having a nerve storm or something."

"Do come and help me, Drusilla. It's a frightfully difficult dress to get into. Pull it down all around, will you? I just suddenly felt I had to put it on."

Jessica's face, faintly flushed from her struggle,

appeared out of a swirl of gold, and she blushed deeper, with embarrassment, as she confronted her sister's cool, critical gaze.

"I suppose I am silly," she said, defiantly. "In fact, I know it's silly to be trying on my wedding dress at this unearthly hour in the morning, but brides are always allowed to behave idiotically on their wedding day."

"Not this sort of idiocy, though," said Drusilla, calmly. "Tears and hysterics, and changing your mind at the last minute if you like, but not just pure vanity. . . . I think that's all right now."

Drusilla, who was kneeling to pull down the long skirt, leaned back on her heels and fingered its stiff folds.

"It's lovely," she said. "I am glad you had it long enough to touch your toes, and I'm glad it's a picture frock, too. I know they're overdone, but they do suit us; we're just the type."

She got up and stood, in her green dressing-gown, beside Jessica in her formal gold tissue.

"We're absurdly alike," said Jessica, looking in the mirror at their two faces, with the same broad foreheads, gray eyes, pointed chins, and backward-springing yellow hair. "If anything, I think you're prettier than me."

"I don't know," said Drusilla, complacently.

"You vary more, of course, but at your best I think you're a little better than me. Anyhow, we'll both be all right today."

"I do hope so. You know, I really feel looks matter frightfully. I feel so entirely right about Hugh, and I would like to look as dazzling as I feel, but it simply isn't possible."

"Are you really as much in love as all that?" Drusilla asked, curiously.

"Yes, I am," answered Jessica, her face intent and serious. "I'm madly in love, and so is Hugh, and we think we can pull off a really lovely marriage."

Drusilla sighed.

"You're a funny, whole-hearted little creature," she said. "It's queer that I'm two years older than you and I've never been the least bit in love."

"Do just get me out of this," said Jessica; but as she began to pull the long sleeves over her hands a sudden shaft of sunlight struck across the room, and lit up her yellow hair and her gold gown.

"Oh, look, Drusilla! How beautifully lucky! What a proper omen!"

She twisted herself so that the sun caught her shining train.

"I think it is rather lucky," Drusilla assented. "Here, let me take it off before you tear it on anything."

"Drusilla, let's go and look at the presents again," said Jessica as she carefully hung the discarded frock over a chair and put on her dressing-gown.

"You really are crazy, I think. You've seen them a thousand times."

"Yes, I know, but never in the early morning, and they'll look quite different. Besides, two came last night and I want to put them with the others in the billiard-room."

"Come on, then, if you must, but for goodness' sake be quiet. Mother will be unhinged if she thinks you're awake so early. You're supposed to be having breakfast in bed at ten, aren't you?"

Very quietly Jessica and Drusilla crept downstairs, turning to smile at each other when a step creaked, with an expression of childish guilt at the clandestine little expedition. As they reached the bottom of the stairs the banisters cracked loudly. Jessica seized Drusilla's hand, giggled, and ran across the hall into the billiard-room, where the presents in a glittering mass covered the large table and smaller tables placed round the walls.

"Do you know, I believe I am rather excited!" said Jessica, giggling again. "I never meant to be and I don't expect I will be after breakfast, but at present I feel just silly."

"You're light-headed, I think. But it will wear off later on and it's better than being gloomy. Do you remember how awful Marjorie was? I never shall forget how you and I spent the whole morning propping her up, and talking endlessly about all sorts of imbecile things, because as soon as we stopped she cried."

Drusilla and Jessica laughed out loud at the thought of their eldest sister's wedding four years ago, when the bride had gone to the altar as if to a sacrifice, with tears and forebodings.

"How ugly our bridesmaids' frocks were, too!" said Jessica, reminiscently. "You know, it's funny how unlike us Marjorie is. You and I always laugh at the same things, and take the same things seriously, and we look alike, too, but Marjorie is hopelessly different, so very homespun, somehow."

"You're not quite homespun enough, you know. I often wonder how you'll stay the course."

"Oh, Drusilla, don't be so sinister, I implore you, or I'll go all weepy like Marjorie! Besides, I'm not half so trivial and erratic as you

think. I'm pretty solid, really; it's only when I think of Hugh I feel like a gas-filled balloon."

"This is a ghastly thing," said Drusilla, inconsequently, lifting up a heavy silver cake stand and turning it about to see if there was any angle at which it could be considered anything but ugly.

"Yes, isn't it atrocious? But at least it's silver. Just think of the Blakes giving us that awful electroplate teapot, when they are as rich as Crœsus, too! I think it's pretty stingy of them; and it's a hideous shape, too."

"Well, they don't like you, you know," said Drusilla, calmly. "They think you're aggressively modern and probably rather fast, so really it was very good of them to give you anything."

"I don't see that at all. They only did give it to me because they like mother and daddy; it was nothing to do with me at all. Drusilla, isn't it funny how people show off with wedding presents. That huge china jar from the Carters, I mean, obviously chosen for its bulk, and I'd simply have loved it if it had been so small you could hardly see it—about as big as a thimble, perhaps."

Jessica wandered down the long table, touching the silver objects carelessly, but gently stroking the china. Drusilla, who was draping a Spanish

shawl more elegantly over a screen, looked up and laughed at her.

"You really are impossible," she said. "How could you want a jar the size of a thimble? That one will be useful for umbrellas, too."

Jessica clasped her hands passionately.

"I know," she said. "I know one must have umbrellas, and things must be big, but I'd like to be a dwarf and live in an exquisite little Japanese garden. Small things are so very rare."

"Not really," Drusilla disagreed; "they're often very mean and cunning."

"How vile you are to disagree with me today!" said Jessica, happily. "Oh, Drusilla, just look at this! Four sets of coffee-cups all cheek by jowl! How shockingly tactless! All the people who gave me coffee-cups will have their feelings terribly hurt and wish they had given me mustard pots instead. I must rearrange them. One here and one there wouldn't be so noticeable."

Drusilla picked up a small jeweler's box and looked at the long string of jade curled round on the white-velvet lining.

"A gorgeous present," she commented. "Jade is lovely stuff, and it suits you, too. Really, I think it very decent of old Mrs. Hugh to give you a personal present like that."

"I like her; she's rather a pet. And I like Hugh's grannie, too. She's frightfully nice. I do hope she likes me, because I know she loves Hugh and I'd hate to come between them. It's only Hugh's mother I'm frightened of, though I like her, too. You know sooner or later I'm bound to shock her. She thinks I'm a child, and Hugh and I are a pretty little couple, and so on, and if I said something was bloody—and I might easily, even with her there—she'd have a fit."

"You probably will give her a shock sometime. She's absolutely wrapped in illusions, as far as I can see, especially about her children."

"I know she is," Jessica sighed. "You know, Drusilla, I'd like to have a good many children, especially boys, I think, but I'd rather drown them at birth than live on them as Mrs. Greene does."

"How do you mean?"

Jessica relapsed into vagueness. "I don't know," she said, "only she seems so mixed up with them, somehow, and Hugh is so utterly exquisite when you think of him as an isolated entity."

"He is rather, but you'd better not think of him as an isolated entity; he isn't ever likely to be. He's part of a very compact family, and you'll be part of it, too."

"I know I'll have to get used to it, and it doesn't really matter. I'd swallow a clan from Whitechapel to get Hugh, if I had to."

The hall clock struck seven.

"Haven't you finished fussing over the presents yet?" said Drusilla. "You must have spaced out the coffee-cups by now, and I do think you ought to go back to bed again for a bit."

"All right, I'll come now. The maids will be up in a minute, and we'd better creep back now before they hear us."

They stole quietly upstairs, and Jessica got into bed again.

"Stay a minute, Drusilla. Sit on the bed and let's talk," she said, and immediately fell silent. Drusilla waited.

"Well, what about?" she asked at last.

"I don't know," said Jessica, seriously. "There really is nothing to say at all. Here I am sort of suspended in mid-air between never-been-married and never-again-be-unmarried, and I'm not sure that I'll ever feel anything much lovelier than this just waiting till I see Hugh this afternoon at two-thirty exactly."

"Darling, you're all agog. It is nice. I wish I could fall in love like that."

"I used to think you were a little fond of Stephen Wilcox. Weren't you?" asked Jessica, curiously. "But don't say so if you'd rather not. It's an indelicate question." She blushed furiously, but Drusilla answered, quite unmoved.

"Well, yes I was, rather, but one night at a dance he kissed me a lot and got very worked up, and it struck me as just funny and rather clumsy. I didn't have the faintest thrill; so I knew it wouldn't do."

"I'm not at all like that." Jessica spoke with solemn emphasis. "I get the most extraordinary thrills when Hugh kisses me. He musses all my clothes and untidies my hair, and my face gets all blotched and red, and I simply love it. In fact, I think I'm very passionate; and it's a good thing if I am, because Hugh says he is."

"God knows how he manages it with those parents; but I should think he may be, all the same, he's so good-looking." Drusilla yawned. "I think I'd better go now," she said. "You look sleepy, and I am, too, and it's still nearly two hours till breakfast."

"Oh, don't go yet! Stay one more minute," Jessica begged. "I do like talking to you. Drusilla, I feel most awfully glad I'm a virgin. Isn't

it lucky? It would be terrible to have a past, don't you think? So disappointing, somehow?"

"You're being incredibly Victorian, all worked up and excited and old-fashioned; and, besides, my girl, you have a past. What about that awful boy, Richardson, when you were seventeen?"

Jessica's face and neck crimsoned slowly.

"Don't tease me about that," she said. "I can hardly bear to think of it, it was so undignified and vulgar, and when mother found us kissing in the garage it was absolute hell. I can hardly believe it's two years since it happened; it feels like yesterday."

"I'm sorry I teased you, then," said Drusilla, smiling. "Honestly, I thought you'd have forgotten all about it by now. Anyhow, it's not important in the least I promise you." She stood up and, looking down at Jessica, added: "Really, you're not to fuss about it now. Hugh is charming, and you'll be married to him in a minute and live happily ever after."

"I know I will," said Jessica, lazily; and as Drusilla shut the door she turned over and smoothed her pillow, happily conscious that the next morning Hugh's dark head would be lying on it, beside her. Darling Hugh! she thought,

drowsily, and fell asleep, regardless of the sunlight on her face.

II

The sound of her mother's voice woke her for the second time.

"My dear child, do you know it's half past ten? I really thought I'd better wake you to have some breakfast."

She was followed by a maid carrying a tray, and as Jessica pushed back her hair, rubbed her eyes, and sat up, Mrs. Deane took the tray, put it on a table, and sat down on the bed. She kissed Jessica and smiled.

"You know I feel quite sentimental," she said, "and a little excited, too. After all, here you are, my youngest daughter, on her wedding day—a most thrilling event for any mother."

"You're every bit as bad as I am, mother. Do you know, when I was awake before, I felt so silly that I couldn't stop giggling! Do you know the feeling?"

"Of course I do. But, oh, my dear"—Mrs. Deane caught her breath—"I'm going to miss you terribly. The house will be as quiet as a tomb without you. When I sit in the front pew this

afternoon watching you and your father come up the aisle, I shall shed tears into my bouquet."

"You mustn't, darling, really you mustn't. I'll be completely mortified if you do. I can't have you weeping at my wedding. I know Marjorie will, and that'll be bad enough, Heaven knows."

"Well, you must have your breakfast now, anyhow," said Mrs. Deane, getting up decisively to pour out the coffee; "but I warn you that, whatever you say, I shall shed a tear or two. What I shall do when Drusilla marries I can't think. Thank goodness I've still got her."

"By that time you'll have shoals of grandchildren to console you," Jessica suggested, comfortably.

"My dear Jessica——" began Mrs. Deane, but broke off suddenly and continued: "Oh, well, I suppose you young things know your own business best, but I could never even have thought a thing like that on my wedding morning."

"No, darling, I don't suppose you could; but then your generation was so stuffy, wasn't it?" said Jessica, gently.

"Some of us were very happy, anyhow," retorted Mrs. Deane, kissing Jessica again. "I couldn't want anything better for you than to be as happy with Hugh as I've been with your

father. But really, my dear, it's very naughty of you to keep me here gossiping. I have a hundred and one things to see to. In fact, I must go this minute and see if the bouquets have arrived yet. Eat a proper breakfast and don't hurry."

As Mrs. Deane opened the door, Drusilla appeared on the threshold.

"Oh, mother," she said, with an accent of the deepest reproach, "you're no good at all. You ought to have been having a serious talk with Jessica. I've been eavesdropping for hours, hoping you would begin to instruct her in the facts of life, and all I heard was her telling you you were stuffy!"

When Mrs. Deane blushed she looked like both her daughters, and now she twisted her fingers in a gesture that Jessica, too, was betrayed into in moments of embarrassment.

"Really, you're terrible," she said, distractedly, "both of you! I don't know which of you is the most indelicate. I shall go and take refuge with the caterers and the furniture men. They have much nicer minds than either of my daughters. Good-by, darlings."

She hurried out, and Drusilla took her place on Jessica's bed.

"I'm holding a series of audiences this morn-

ing," said Jessica. "Obviously, it's the proper thing for all the family to tiptoe in and peep at me ghoulishly to make sure I haven't faded away in the night. Isn't mother a duck?"

"Yes, she's rather sweet," answered Drusilla, "and frightfully competent, too. You know there is a vast amount of arranging to be done for a show like this, and you and I haven't done a hand's turn to help, have we?"

Jessica's white forehead wrinkled into a frown.

"It's rather worrying," she began. "Of course I shan't have to bother about anything on my honeymoon. Hugh is marvelous about trains and arrangements, and he can do it all; but I suppose in a month, when we come home, I'll have to settle down and be a proper person and everyone will criticize me."

"Not any more than they do now, surely?"

"Yes, far more. A few of the Greene relations may swallow me, but most of them will think everything I do is wrong, and they'll be sorry for Hugh, and you know quite well, Drusilla, that I shall never be able to scold the servants."

"I think that probably comes with practice," Drusilla reassured her; "and, anyhow, you aren't going to be living so far away that we can't keep an eye on you."

"I know. That does help, of course. But, Drusilla, I do feel I must go on letting Hugh be a Greene; I mustn't try and absorb him into our family. I really have a scruple about it."

"Well, I don't think you need have. There isn't the faintest chance of Hugh being dissociated from his family. But, anyhow, you're full of contradictions. Only this morning you said you thought of him as an isolated fragment or something."

"Really, Drusilla, you're very dense sometimes," said Jessica, a little piqued. But Drusilla only laughed.

"You can't possibly understand," began Jessica. But at the sound of a car drawing up at the front door below with a good deal of unnecessary hooting, she stopped and sat bolt upright, a scarlet patch of excitement on either cheek.

"Drusilla, that's Hugh!" she said, and jumping out of bed, she darted over to the window, pushed it up, and hung out, waving wildly.

Drusilla leaned over her shoulder, and saw Hugh standing on the steps below, carrying two huge parcels and smiling up at Jessica.

"Darling, come up and see me," called Jessica. "It's most unseemly of you to be here on

our wedding day, but since you are here you must come up. What have you come for, anyhow?"

"Two important presents from two important people," said Hugh, gayly. "Mother wants them shown in most conspicuous places, and incidentally she thought she'd better give me a job to keep my nerves steady."

"Oh, are you nervous, Hugh? Do come up at once, dearest. Why does nobody let you in?"

"I don't suppose you've rung, have you?" Drusilla called down.

"Heavens! I forgot!" said Hugh laughing, "I was just going to when Jessica appeared for the balcony scene."

He laid down one parcel and rang the bell, still looking up.

"Couldn't you throw me a flower or something romantic?" he asked.

Jessica tore a small bow of gold ribbon off the shoulder of her nightgown, kissed it, and flung it down to him.

"There you are," she called, watching it flutter slowly and uncertainly down to the street. "My God! it's going down into the area; it'll be wasted on cook. No, it isn't; it's all right."

As her shrill, excited tones followed the flight of the light scrap of ribbon, a shocked

and inquisitive face appeared at the window opposite, and at the same moment she heard her mother's voice behind her.

"Jessica, come in at once! This is really too much! You must not lean out of the window in your nightgown. Drusilla, you shouldn't have allowed her."

Jessica waved airily to Hugh, blew a kiss to the face in the opposite house, drew in her head, and shut the window.

"It's Hugh, mother," she said, as if that explained the whole situation. "He's down below with two important parcels from two important people."

"Well, that makes it worse," said Mrs. Deane, severely. "You were hanging half out of the window and all the top of your nightgown is transparent lace. Really, I feel quite cross with you both!"

"Don't be cross, darling," implored Jessica. "My trousseau nighties are far more indecent than this, and look, I'll put on a dressing-gown before he comes up."

"He is certainly not coming up, Jessica. It would be most unsuitable."

Jessica flung her arms round her mother's neck and kissed her.

"Very well, darling," she said, "we won't outrage you any more; he shan't come up. I'll go down to him instead."

Laughing, she snatched up her dressing-gown and ran out of the room and downstairs, her bare feet flashing white over the green carpet.

Mrs. Deane laughed reluctantly.

"I'm perfectly helpless with Hugh and Jessica," she said. "It's no use hoping for any sense from either of them. Jessica is like a child; she's quite fey with excitement."

"It's really all right, mother," Drusilla soothed her. "She's frightfully happy and they do suit each other. I honestly think Hugh understands her perfectly."

"Yes, I feel that, too," said Mrs. Deane, going out on to the landing. "It's very satisfactory because Jessica *is* so temperamental."

She leaned over the banisters and then turned smilingly to Drusilla.

"Just look at them on the landing! They wouldn't mind if the servants and the caterers and all the furniture men were drawn up in rows to look at them."

Quickly sensitive to the watching eyes above, Hugh looked up.

"I say, Mrs. Deane," he said, apologetically,

"I know I oughtn't to be here, but mother sent me round with a couple of presents, and now I am here I must talk to Jessica for a minute."

"Yes, of course, my dear," agreed Mrs. Deane, entirely forgetting her conventional qualms. "Go into my sitting-room; it's the only room in the house that isn't upside down. But really you can only have ten minutes and then Jessica must come upstairs."

She turned to Drusilla.

"Do go down and talk to your father, dearest. The servants have chased him from room to room, and now he's pacing round the billiard table in a terrible state of nerves. He ought to have gone to his office; it would have been much more sensible; but he had a feeling that Jessica might want him."

"All right, mother. What are you going to do?"

"I'm just going to see that all her things are properly packed. But you know, Drusilla, I do not think she should have said her nightgowns were indecent."

"My dear mother," said Drusilla, decisively, going downstairs, "if you take seriously any one thing Jessica may say today, you will forfeit all my respect and admiration."

"I hope she'll be serious in church, at least," retorted Mrs. Deane, and went into the spare bedroom to look a little mournfully at Jessica's strapped trunks.

III

In the sitting-room, Hugh and Jessica sat down on the rug in front of the fire. Hugh suddenly noticed her bare toes.

"My sweet," he said, "did you come running downstairs to me, all in your bare toes?"

Jessica leaned restfully against him as she answered: "Of course I did! I didn't dare wait, in case mother would stop me, and, anyhow, I forgot about slippers." She took his hand and gently flexed the fingers one by one. "I've been mad with excitement all morning," she said. "And now you are with me I feel quite comfortable and easy and peaceful."

"We ought always to be together," said Hugh, emphatically. "I hate to think I'll have to leave you alone every day when I go to the office."

"Oh, but that's years away! A whole month at least before we need think about it. All the same, I would rather like to be a typist, or perhaps

something a little grander, in your office. Couldn't it be arranged?"

"It could not, darling—not possibly; but, anyhow, it will be good coming home to you in the evenings."

"It's a pity there are so many magazine stories," said Jessica, hazily, gazing into the fire. "You know the sort of stuff, bright eyes at the window, or the little woman at the garden gate. Now I shall be forced to stay on the sofa in my elegant yellow drawing-room, and when you come in I shall just look up from my book in a casual way, and say, 'Hello Hugh!' "

"If you do wait like that I'll know you don't love me any more. You never wait for people you love, or even people you like. You always rush to meet them."

"Yes, but I'm going to be quite different now. When I'm a young matron—isn't it a ghastly expression?—I shall behave like a young matron and put away childish things and stop looking through a glass darkly."

"All at once, sweetheart? Jessica, I do love you so."

Hugh caught her to him and kissed her, but she gently warded him off.

"I love you too, Hugh. I adore you. But

you mustn't spoil my face. It isn't vanity, but I do want to look lovely for you today."

"My dearest, you will. You couldn't look lovelier than you do now, all rumpled and crumpled, but still I've often looked forward to your coming up the aisle to me in the gold frock and train that I've never seen, with a veil all over your darling face."

"I'm not wearing it over my face; it didn't go with my kind of naked forehead. It just falls back from a thing they call a filet. . . . Have you really imagined that, Hugh?"

"Often. I've lain awake at nights thinking about it, till sometimes I got so wide awake that I had to get up and walk about and hang out of the window, and sometimes I got so drugged with my own thoughts that I went to sleep thinking it was really happening."

"It's queer that you should love me so much, Hugh, but I should die at once if you didn't."

The door opened and a housemaid came in to see to the fire.

"Go away, Mary," said Jessica, dreamily. "We've only got ten minutes together; we can't be interrupted."

"I'm so sorry, Miss Jessica," said Mary. "I'll

see that nobody else disturbs you. The fire can wait."

She closed the door very softly, and went downstairs to inform the other servants that the sitting-room fire could await Miss Jessica's pleasure.

"Wouldn't it be appalling, Hugh, if we really had only ten minutes and then you had to leave me to go to China or some place?"

"Awful!" said Hugh, shortly, an expression of pain on his face.

"But we needn't worry," Jessica consoled him. "We've got all the time there is, haven't we?"

"Darling, we'll need it. I can't ever have enough of you."

Jessica suddenly shivered.

"Are you cold, my sweet?" he asked, anxiously.

"Not a bit. I suddenly thought of something."

Jessica fell silent.

"What did you think of to make you shudder like that? Tell me, darling."

Hugh held her more closely, but Jessica did not answer for a moment, and when she did she spoke jerkily and nervously.

"I was thinking of that terrifying play 'Hassan.' Do you remember how the two lovers could either be free and never see each other again, or else have one night together and then die in tor-

ture? I often think of that and I know I should choose to have the night with you even if I did have to be tortured; but still it does frighten me."

"Darling, don't think of it. We're fools to sit and frighten each other with idiotic impossibilities. Besides, every minute of today belongs to me and I insist on you being happy."

Hugh spoke gayly, but as he looked down at Jessica he saw two tears hanging on her eyelashes.

"Jessica dear," he said. "Nothing is really wrong, is it? You haven't changed your mind about marrying me, have you?"

Jessica held him convulsively, and smiled, though her tears fell.

"No, of course not," she said. "Nothing is wrong. I'm just a damned fool. I love you so and I get into dreadful panics about losing you and not having you any more."

"I'll keep you safe, I promise," Hugh spoke earnestly. "I'll always take care of you, my only love."

"I know you will, Hugh. It's all right, really, I do feel safe with you. Sometimes I lose my nerve, that's all, and the other day mother said something about not putting all my eggs in one basket."

"How silly!" Hugh laughed scornfully,

"What would be the use of scattering them about in dozens of baskets. Besides, your mother did it herself, and very successfully, too. She adores your father."

Jessica sprang to her feet.

"Oh, Hugh!" she exclaimed, conscience-stricken. "I've never seen daddy all day, and I know he'll be feeling utterly miserable about losing me. I must go to him at once."

"You're a vain creature, and, anyhow, you don't want to go dashing off this minute to look for him. I'll have to go soon and you can find him then."

"Oh dear! I suppose it's all right. I'll wait till you go."

Jessica sat down again, drew Hugh's arm round her, and leaned back comfortably on his shoulder.

"I'm not vain," she said. "But daddy really is different. He needs me quite badly, just as I need him, and often I feel guilty for marrying you and leaving him."

"But, darling, I need you frightfully. Honestly, I need you more than your father. I know he loves you, but, my dear, I do more than that. I couldn't live without you."

"I'm glad," said Jessica. "We're both in the same boat, then."

Forgetting to care about her complexion, she turned her face to Hugh to be kissed. As Drusilla came in they broke apart from each other, but Jessica still kept her arms linked around Hugh's neck.

"Must he go now?" she asked, vaguely. "How terribly cruel!"

"Yes, I'm afraid he must," said Drusilla. "It's nearly twelve and it will take you all that time to bathe and dress and have some sort of meal. But it isn't really so very cruel, you know, Jessica. You've only got to wait about three hours till you have him for good."

"It is cruel," Jessica persisted, wildly. "He'll never have me again as Jessica Deane. It will all be quite different and it's been so lovely up till now."

"But I'm longing for the end of Jessica Deane," said Hugh, laughing.

"Don't laugh at me. You can't be certain that everything will be all right. Don't laugh at me," said Jessica, brokenly.

Hugh took her in his arms.

"My darling," he said, soberly, "I am certain that everything will be all right. It won't be any different, only a million times better."

"Are you sure, Hugh? Are you really sure?"

"I promise you I am. Listen, sweet, I must go now and Drusilla will help you to dress and look after you. Won't you, Drusilla?" He looked appealingly over Jessica's head. "And I'll be waiting for you when you come up the aisle with your father, and you must tip me a little wink when you get to me just to show me you're all right."

"Oh, darling, of course I'm all right!" said Jessica, happily. "I am, Drusilla, aren't I? I'm only a little crazed today, it's all so queer and lovely. I don't know what got me; I just suddenly felt sad for a minute. I think it was thinking about daddy, but I'll go and comfort him a little when you've gone. Good-by, my own dear love."

"I believe this is the only time I've ever said good-by to you without getting an actual physical pain in the pit of my stomach."

"My dears," interrupted Drusilla, still waiting in the doorway, "I don't want to interrupt you, but ——"

"All right, Drusilla, I've gone. Better do it quickly."

Hugh kissed Jessica, ran downstairs, and in a moment the slam of the front door echoed through the house.

Jessica stood still where he had left her, staring vacantly after him.

"Jessica, are you asleep?" Drusilla asked her.

She shook her head and her eyes lightened.

"No, I'm not. I'm awake and blissfully happy. Tell me, shall I go and talk to daddy now, or have my bath first. I haven't seen him all morning."

"I honestly think you ought to start dressing first. Daddy's all right. He is prowling round the house, with everyone falling over him and carrying dishes and things round him."

"Poor darling!" said Jessica, tenderly. "Don't let me have too hot a bath," she warned Drusilla on the way upstairs. "I must be careful not to let my hair go limp."

IV

Dressing was pure delight. Jessica put on for the second time that day the yellow silk vest, the long gold silk stockings, and the narrow gold shoes, but added, this time, yellow silk knickers and a pair of gold garters.

As she stepped back to look at herself before putting on her frock, she said, earnestly, "I do hope Hugh will like my shape."

"But surely you know he does," said Drusilla,

reassuring. "He thinks you're lovely and you are rather, today."

"But he's never seen me stark," said Jessica, simply. "It makes a difference. I think I'm too boyish-looking. I'd like to be frightfully feminine just for once."

"But you are, in that frock. It really is charming. Do let me get you into it now. I ought to go and dress now, myself. And here's mother."

"I'm all ready, darling," said Mrs. Deane. "I just came to help to finish you off. Where's Marchmont?"

"We sent her away because Drusilla was helping me, and I hate a crowd."

"Well, I'll slip your frock on for you, my dear, but Marchmont had better arrange the veil, I think."

"You do look nice, mother, in all your elegance. Is daddy dressed too?"

"No, not yet; he's fussing a little."

"Oh, mummy, I must see him. Please go and tell him to come up."

"It will do just as well when you're dressed, darling. You really must get on."

Jessica suddenly balked.

"I can't," she said. "I really can't put my frock on till I see daddy. It's an inhibition."

She giggled softly, and Mrs. Deane looked at her in consternation as she sat down, still in her yellow underclothes, and twisted her feet, like a child, round the legs of the chair.

"My dearest Jessica," she remonstrated, "you must try to be calm or you will make us all nervous and unhappy."

"Oh, darling, I'm sorry!" said Jessica, instantly penitent. "Look, I'll get dressed as good as gold while you call daddy."

As she spoke she struggled into her frock, and when Mrs. Deane came back, followed by Mr. Deane, she ran to her father, trailing her train across the bedroom floor.

"Dearest," she said, "I've been wanting you all morning. I've been shut in by a conspiracy of women. Quite shocking. I feel as if I were in a harem."

"Well, you seemed to have a good long time with Hugh, I noticed."

"Oh, that was only a minute. Besides, he came on business with two presents. Do I look nice?"

Jessica stepped back as she asked the question, and trod on her train. There was a little ripping sound as it tore away from one shoulder.

"Oh, Jessica, you've torn it! I knew perfectly

well something would happen if you got so excited. Now I'll have to fetch Marchmont to mend it."

Mrs. Deane hurried away, and Mr. Deane looked guiltily at Jessica.

"I think I'd better get out of this," he said. "It's no place for me. But just tell me, my dear, you're quite happy, aren't you?"

"Of course I am, daddy. How do you mean, exactly?"

Mr. Deane cleared his throat nervously.

"I don't mean anything, Jessica. Only, if you have any doubts or worries or anything, far better call it off now than go on with it."

He spoke fiercely and with his eyes averted. Heedless of her already torn frock, Jessica flung her arms round his neck.

"You're too sweet, darling," she said. "I know it would kill you to have your daughter jib at the altar. It really is sweet of you to suggest it. But I'm all right, daddy. For once in my life I'm quite sure, with no afterthoughts and no terrors. Hugh's the proper person for me to belong to. You'd better go now; they're coming to mend me."

She stood still and quiet while the train was readjusted, and Mrs. Deane, looking at the steady

glow of color in her cheeks, felt relieved and contented. It seemed only a moment till Drusilla came back wearing her gold bridesmaid's dress with a heavy mediæval green girdle falling in two strands to the ground. She was carrying a bouquet of tawny chrysanthemums, and a sheaf of faintly green speckled orchids for Jessica.

"Here's your exotic bouquet, my child," she said. "And I think it's far too macabre for a bride, but I suppose you like it. And here are the chicken sandwiches," she added, as a maid entered with a tray.

Another moment for eating the sandwiches, and then a kiss from her mother, a kiss from Drusilla, and they were gone to Jessica's wedding, leaving the house very still, as if all life in it were suspended.

Jessica came slowly downstairs to the drawing-room to find her father. He was waiting for her at the door.

"Come in and sit down," he advised. "We ought to give them fully five minutes' start. That will be enough."

He looked anxiously at his watch and apprais-ingly at Jessica.

"Not nervous, are you, dear? You look very

nice indeed, and there's nothing to be nervous about. It's quite plain sailing now."

He patted her hand fussily, and pulled out his watch again. Jessica smiled.

"No, I'm not," she said. "Not a scrap. But you are. You've looked at your watch twice in the last minute."

"Nonsense! I'm not at all nervous. I've done all this before. It's not so very long since I gave Marjorie away, you know."

"But that was different, wasn't it, daddy?" Jessica insinuated, softly.

Mr. Deane cleared his throat.

"Well, of course, Marjorie was much older and then she had been engaged a long time and—yes, well, it was a little different," he finished, lamely.

"You know quite well what I meant, darling; you're just being evasive. I meant we were rather special, you and I."

"Now, Jessica, we must be sensible." Mr. Deane looked at his watch. "It's time we were off. We must allow a little extra in case of a block. Come along, dear, and be careful with your train. Your mother told me to see you didn't disarrange yourself."

"Kiss me once, daddy, before we go."

"Now be sensible, my dear. Your mother said I wasn't to let you get excited."

"Darling, stop quoting mother at me," said Jessica as she kissed her father and took his arm to go downstairs.

"Don't let your train touch the step," he adjured her. "There, that's all right." He stepped into the car.

"Good wishes, Miss Jessica," said the parlor-maid, smiling broadly, as she shut the door and the car started for the church.

"Hugh's made all the arrangements about tickets and so forth, hasn't he?" asked Mr. Deane.

"Yes, I think so, daddy; he's very competent."

"Well, I gave your mother twenty pounds for you, my dear. Better have some ready money when you're traveling. She said she would put it in the purse you were taking away with you."

"That was kind of you. Thank you, darling. I know Hugh is taking heaps of money, but it's useful to have a little of my own."

"Yes, quite; that was what I thought. Surely the car is going very slowly. We must not be late." He looked at his watch again and added, "No, it's all right; still seven minutes to the half-hour and we're nearly there."

Jessica pressed his hand gently.

"Your mother will miss you," said Mr. Deane, abruptly.

"Not half as much as you will, daddy. And I'll miss you, too. I wish you could come with me. Will you write to me tomorrow, or the next day, or very soon, anyhow?"

"Certainly I will; yes, certainly. But you mustn't worry; just take things easily. Everything is perfectly satisfactory and straightforward."

"I'm looking forward to the church bit of it, but not to the reception so much. But truly, I'm not fussed, daddy."

"That's right. There's no need to be. Hugh's a good boy. If he weren't I'd never have allowed it."

"Sweetheart, you couldn't have stopped it; not possibly; nothing could."

"Now, my dear, you must be wise and don't exaggerate. Here we are. Be very careful getting out. Your mother said you might get your train muddy just here."

As Jessica trailed the long gold train up the red carpet, she smiled at the eager, peering faces on either side, and when a hoarse voice at the top said, "Good luck, miss," she half turned and said,

"Thank you, indeed," in her usual clear, steady voice.

A blur of massed faces swam before her eyes as she peeped into the church from the porch, while her two small pages caught up the loops of her train and the bridesmaids formed themselves into a procession.

"Now, Jessica, are you ready?" whispered Mr. Deane, urgently, as the organ burst out into a hymn and the congregation stood up.

"Yes, darling. Let's start. I can't see Hugh from here."

She walked slowly up the long aisle, her face uncovered, her head not bent in the conventional attitude, a half-smile of anticipation on her lips.

Then Hugh's face, a deep voice hurrying through the prescribed service, her father leaving her to slip into a pew, her own voice more distinct than usual, and Hugh's less distinct, a confused interlude of kisses and congratulations in the vestry, and once more she was in the car, this time with Hugh.

"My darling," he said quietly. "My lovely, darling Jessica."

"I'm glad now that I'm Jessica Greene because I love you so."

"Only a little minute, my sweet, and then we'll get away from these people and be by ourselves."

"I don't mind them. They're all wondering if we'll be happy and if you'll be good to me, and thinking back to their own wedding days and having lumps in their throats."

"I certainly should have a lump in my throat if I were old and dull and came to your wedding, Jessica. You'll never know how beautiful you looked coming to me."

They sat blissfully silent till the car stopped, and the parlormaid was again at the door, smiling brightly as she said:

"Congratulations, Mrs. Greene, please, and to you, too, sir."

Jessica laughed.

"It does sound funny," she said. "Thank you, Morgan. I suppose we ought to hurry upstairs and get ready in the drawing-room. Come along, Hugh; the mob may be on us at any moment."

Three-quarters of an hour later, after more congratulations, a steady hum of conversation, and an exhausting atmosphere of heat, feathers, and flowers, Jessica found herself being shepherded up to her room by Drusilla.

"It all went beautifully," said Drusilla.

"Really, Jessica, you looked as nice as you wanted to."

"Oh, Drusilla, I am so glad it's over! And yet I enjoyed every single minute, and I would like to do it all again, but of course I can't, ever. What a depressing thought!"

"You silly little thing. Why be depressed because you can't have a second wedding before you've even finished your first? Here, have some tea. Mother said you must while you were changing."

"The whole of today has been nothing but eating queer foods at queer times, and saying thank you and dressing and undressing. I'm sorry to take my frock off and leave it behind."

"Never mind. We'll have the neck cut a little lower while you're away and you can wear it for your first proper dinner party when you come home."

"Isn't it odd that I'm not coming home, Drusilla? I mean that I'm going to another house with Hugh."

"It's beastly. I'll probably get married myself, now."

"I don't think you'd better. It would be such a blow for the two poor dear lambs."

"Jessica, what cheek! Do you mean that I'm

to be an elderly spinster just so that you can leave the parents with a clear conscience?"

"I'm not leaving them with a clear conscience. I wish I were, but I feel awful about daddy."

"Don't worry. He loves Hugh, you know. We're bound to feel damnably flat when the people go and we realize we're alone; but we'll get over it all right."

"Please don't get over it entirely, Drusilla. I would like to know you were missing me. . . . Oh, Marjorie, come in!"

Marjorie Sellars kissed Jessica perfunctorily.

"Well, it was all very nice," she said. "I must say I liked all that gold much better than I expected to. But Mrs. Greene says she would have preferred a white wedding, so I'm afraid you've put your foot in it, Jessica."

"What nonsense," said Drusilla, irritably. "It doesn't matter a scrap whether she approved or not."

"I don't really mind at all." Jessica's voice was carefree. "She doesn't know much about clothes, so I don't mind; and Lavinia, who does know, liked it awfully."

"Lavinia looked very nice, I thought," said Marjorie. "But your other sister-in-law, Helen, is very plain, isn't she?"

Jessica and Drusilla gasped.

"You're mad, Marjorie," said Jessica, quietly. "You must surely see that she's definitely attractive?"

"Not at all. I always think red hair is a little vulgar," said Marjorie briskly. "But surely it's time you were dressed, isn't it? When's your train?"

"Not till four forty-five, I think, and I'm just going to dress."

There was a knock at the door and Lavinia came in.

"I won't stay," she began, "I'm sure you don't want me, now, but I had to come and tell you how nicely it all went. You looked lovely, Jessica dear."

Jessica grasped her hand.

"How nice you are, Lavinia!" she said. "Not a bit like a sister-in-law. Did you really like it?"

"Of course I did, immensely; so did everyone."

Another knock heralded the entrance of the five grown-up bridesmaids, who filled the room with their shining frocks and huge bouquets.

"Good Lord!" said one. "She hasn't begun to dress yet. I say, you must hurry, Jessica. People are all lining up the stairs to see you come down, but you'll never get through the mob."

"Well, I shan't hurry down, anyhow," said Jessica, serenely, pulling off her frock. "And I won't be a minute, now; I haven't got to change my underclothes."

"Here are your stockings and shoes, darling," said Drusilla, and Lavinia snatched a shoe out of her hand with a little exclamation of pleasure.

"Oh, I do like these lizards! They're beautifully marked."

"Here, do let me put it on," said Jessica. "And tell me, do you think it will matter if I stop on the way down to say good-by to anyone I specially like. I do want to have a word with daddy in the hall."

"You ought to rush down," said another of the bridesmaids, "as if you were overwhelmed with maidenly confusion and escaping from the plaudits of the crowd."

"I shan't," said Jessica in a muffled voice as she drew her frock over her head.

"Well, I think it will look nice if she goes slowly," commented a third. "And it's a lovely going-away frock."

"Now give me my hat," said Jessica, just as two quiet knocks sounded on the door. Her face flamed. "There's Hugh," she said. "All go away now, I'll be down in a minute. Good-by, my

dears, and thank you all for being my bridesmaids."

"Good-by and good luck, Jessica," said Marjorie, crisply, following the shining flock.

"Good-by, Jessica, dear. Have a lovely honeymoon," said Lavinia, and kissed Hugh as he stood, embarrassed, in the doorway.

"Don't go, Drusilla. I haven't said good-by to you."

Jessica's mouth trembled, but as Hugh came over to her she smiled at him and forgot the pain of parting with Drusilla.

"I'm ready," she said. "Shall we go now, Hugh? Take my hand and let's go slowly. I hate the way they push and run sometimes."

Drusilla went in front to clear a passage, and Hugh and Jessica followed slowly down, saying: "Good-by, Good-by—Thank you—It's been lovely—Good-by—Yes, we've really enjoyed it ourselves—Good-by and thank you."

Mr. and Mrs. Rodney Greene were standing on the first landing. Jessica stopped to kiss them.

"Good-by," she said. "I'll keep Hugh happy," and went on downstairs.

When she met Mrs. Deane, a little lower down, the pause was longer.

"Is daddy at the front door?" she asked.

"Yes, darling; he's waiting for you."

"Good-by, mother. Write to me lots and don't be depressed."

"Of course I won't, dear child! Good-by, Hugh. Take care of her."

Another kiss and they started down again. The hall was crowded, but Drusilla forged steadily on in front, and suddenly Jessica saw her father on the top step. Dropping Hugh's hand, she ran to him and clung round his neck.

"I hate leaving you. I wish you could come, too," she whispered. "Keep on thinking of me all the time, daddy."

"Be happy," said Mr. Deane, "Have a happy time and don't bother about us. We'll miss you, but we'll manage all right. Where's Hugh got to?"

"I'm here, sir," Hugh answered, happily, elbowing his friends to one side and gaining a foothold on the top step. "Good-by and thank you. I'll take care of Jessica."

"Good-by, Hugh. You're all right. And now good-by, my darling girl."

Mr. Deane helped her into the car, and Hugh jumped in beside her; but just before they started Jessica leaned out of the window and kissed her father again.

"I do love you, daddy," she said. "And I am so happy."

"Splendid," said Mr. Deane, stoutly. "Splendid. Good luck to you both."

He stood on the curb as the car moved away, the steps behind him crowded with waving guests, and then turned and went smiling into the house, answering questions, laughing and joking. But he was conscious of a keen and biting pain when he remembered that the first nineteen years of Jessica's life had gone like a leaf before the wind, and at their next meeting she would be no longer Jessica, daughter of Anthony Deane, but Jessica, wife of Hugh Beckett Greene.

CHAPTER VII

Et Cetera

I

ON THE evening of her dinner party for the five other Mrs. Greenes, Mrs. Rodney Greene indulged in a spate of telephone calls. Her first one, to Lavinia, was in the nature of an appeal for help.

"Lavinia dear," she began as soon as she got through, "I want you to help me a little tonight. It's too bad that Martin can't come; we're very disappointed that he won't be back till tomorrow, but of course business must come first."

"He's very sorry, too, but he simply can't help it."

"No, I quite understand. But about tonight. Will you be rather specially attentive to Aunt Dora?"

"Oh, mother, I'm not very good with her!"

"Nonsense! She's quite fond of you in her own way, and you know she feels a little hurt that

Helen has never taken any trouble about her; and now she is annoyed by something that happened at Jessica's wedding, so you must just step into the breach, my dear."

"I know what it was that happened at the wedding. She came late and got put into a back seat."

Lavinia's laugh rang clearly into the telephone, but Mrs. Rodney frowned anxiously as she answered: "Well, whatever it was, I don't want it to crop up tonight, and if you'll just sit beside her after dinner and see that she doesn't feel neglected, I'm sure everything will be quite all right."

"Very well, mother, I'll try, but I don't think it will be very easy."

"My dear child, how absurd you are! Everything will be perfectly easy and smooth. It ought to be a very pleasant little party. Tell me, what frock are you wearing?"

"I haven't really thought. My new black, I expect."

"Oh, not black, dear. Don't you think, yourself, black is rather a pity?"

There was no answer.

"What did you say, dear?" asked Mrs. Rodney.

"I didn't say anything, mother." Lavinia's voice sounded annoyed.

"Darling, surely you don't mind my just suggesting one of your pretty pale frocks rather than a black one?"

"I don't quite know what you mean by black being 'rather a pity.' "

"It's only that I want you to look your best, you silly child, and a pale color is so much younger and more gay. Besides, I'll be wearing black. Now don't forget Aunt Dora, will you, and remember that dinner is at quarter to eight. Your grannie doesn't like it later. Good-by till this evening."

She rang off, and sat at her desk for a moment, looking faintly disturbed, before putting on a call to Jessica.

"Hullo! Who's there?" asked a brusque voice.

"Can I speak to Mrs. Hugh, please? Mrs. Rodney speaking."

"I don't know where Mrs. Greene is, but I'll look for her if you'll wait a minute. Who did you say it was?"

"It's Mrs. Rodney Greene to speak to Mrs. Hugh, if you please."

Edith spoke icily, with an accent of rebuke, but the voice replied, quite undaunted:

"Well, hold on then, I'll look for her."

There was a long wait. Edith sat holding the receiver, jotting down items on her shopping list, until ultimately she heard Jessica's voice.

"Hullo! Is that you, Mrs. Greene?"

"Good morning, Jessica. I hope everything is all right with you. I just wanted a word with you about tonight. You're wearing your wedding frock, of course?"

"Oh, do you want me to? I meant to wear my yellow georgette. I thought the wedding frock would be too dressed up just for a family party."

"I hardly think so, Jessica. After all, the dinner is for you, and I think it would be a nice little courtesy to wear your gold tissue."

"Is the party really for me? How awful!"

This time it was Mrs. Rodney who maintained a silence of sheer annoyance.

"I don't mean 'awful,' of course; I only mean rather frightening."

Jessica's voice was anxious, as if she were conscious of having offended, but Mrs. Rodney replied, briskly and coldly:

"There's no need to be frightened. It's very foolish of you. We only want to welcome you into the family."

"Thank you very much. Of course I'll wear my gold!"

"Well, we'll see you this evening, then, and don't be late. Grannie likes dinner to be very punctual. By the way, Jessica, you really must train your maid to answer the telephone properly."

A faint gasp fluttered along the wire. "Oh, must I? I don't know how to."

"It's perfectly easy. You've only got to tell her exactly what to say when she takes the receiver off; and incidentally you might remind her to call you Mrs. Hugh. There are too many of us all to be Mrs. Greenes."

"I'll try, but it's terribly difficult. She is so much older and more severe than I am."

"I see I'll have to take you in hand a little, my dear. But never mind now. Good-by till to-night."

The faintly perturbed frown was still on Mrs. Rodney's face as she rang up Helen, and it deepened when a polite voice answered her request to speak to Mrs. Geoffrey. "I'm sorry, madam, but Mrs. Geoffrey is engaged in her studio and gave orders that she wasn't to be disturbed before eleven."

"But it's Mrs. Rodney Greene speaking."

"Could you ring up again in about half an hour,

madam, or shall I ask Mrs. Geoffrey to ring you?"

"No, I'll leave it now."

"Thank you, madam." The polite voice died away, and Mrs. Rodney petulantly pushed the telephone aside as her husband came into the room.

"Nothing wrong, Edith, I hope?" he asked, noticing her look of irritation.

"No, nothing, thank you, dear. Only sometimes I get a little cross with all the children's airs and graces."

"I shouldn't let them worry you. You've got enough to do without bothering over them. The car's here and I'm just starting to fetch mother. We ought to be back in good time for lunch. And by the way, dear, do you think we ought to send the car for Dora tonight?"

Edith raised her eyebrows.

"I've arranged to do that, of course," she said in a slightly pained voice. "I'm just going to ring up Dora and let her know."

"Splendid! That's quite all right. Well, I must be off now. Good-by."

"Good-by, Rodney. Be sure the warm rug is in the car for your mother."

Mrs. Rodney sat staring out of the window until the sound of the front door being shut dis-

turbed her thoughts. Then she smoothed her hair, sat very upright in her chair, pulled the telephone once again towards her, and rang up Mrs. Edwin.

"Hullo! Who are you?" she heard her sister-in-law ask.

"Good morning, Dora. It's Edith speaking. How are you?"

Her voice was unusually cordial, as if she hoped to establish a cheerful atmosphere even through the awkward medium of the telephone, where her deliberately bright smile was lost.

"I'm not feeling very well, thank you, Edith. This week is always a particularly trying one for me, you know, and the strain seems to be telling on me more than usual this year."

"What do you say?"

"I say the strain is telling on me more than usual this year. What a bad connection this is."

"Yes, isn't it? I'm so sorry, but what did you say you were telling me?"

"I don't know what you mean, Edith. Hullo! Are you there? This is a disgraceful connection. I only said I was feeling the strain of this week very badly."

"Oh! Yes, of course. I do sympathize with you, Dora. It's a sad time for you, I know. I just wanted a word with you about tonight."

"Really, Edith, I don't know that I shall be able to face a party tonight."

"What do you say?"

"I said that I didn't really know whether I would be able to come tonight or not."

"Oh, that's better now. I can hear you quite clearly. Well, I do hope you'll manage tonight. We'll all be so disappointed if you can't. The children are looking forward to seeing you, and I know grannie and Aunt Sarah are counting on it, too."

"I don't flatter myself that the children, as you call them, care one way or the other about me."

"Oh, that's rubbish, Dora! We all hope you will come. Now, may I send the car for you?"

"Don't trouble, thank you very much. It is not the lack of a car that's preventing me coming."

"No, of course not. I quite understand. But I really rang up just to offer you the car. Dinner is a little early, you see, because of the old ladies, and I thought it might be a convenience."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure. But as it happens I've made my own arrangements. My friend Mrs. Blythe asked me several days ago to use her car both for going and coming."

"That's very nice, then. I'm so glad you feel able to come, after all."

"I don't know that I do, really. I haven't felt quite myself since Jessica's wedding. The church was very draughty near the door and I got badly chilled."

"That's too bad. However, we will expect you tonight; it will be very nice to see you. Good-by till then."

"What, Edith?"

"I said we would expect you tonight at quarter to eight. Good-by for the present."

"But, Edith. Hullo, Edith! Are you still there? I was just explaining that I don't feel well enough to come."

"I'm so sorry the telephone is really intolerable today. I didn't catch what you said."

"I said I wasn't feeling quite myself."

"Well, we'll all be most disappointed, Dora, but of course, if you don't feel well enough, you're much wiser to stay at home."

"But I'd be sorry to disappoint you all. As I said before, it's a pity you chose this date for your party, but still, I must make the effort and come; only don't expect me to be very bright."

"How nice of you! That really is delightful."

Mrs. Rodney tried to infuse a note of warmth into her voice; but as she heard Mrs. Edwin's voice beginning plaintively, "Of course I must say—"

she added, loudly and hurriedly, "Well, *au revoir*, and I'm sure you'll be none the worse of it," and rang off.

Exasperated and depressed, she got up and walked up and down the room in a state of uncharacteristic agitation. She was beset by minor difficulties: Lavinia's annoyance at the merest hint of what to wear; Jessica unable to manage her servant, in need of help and guidance, but quite probably ready to resent both; Dora in her most tiresome and difficult mood.

Mrs. Rodney sighed impatiently and rang the bell. When the butler appeared she sat down again at her desk, took up a list, and ran through it.

"About dinner tonight. There are one or two things to arrange. First of all, Rayner, I want you to be on the upper landing to show everyone into the drawing-room. Evans must open the front door, but I specially want you to announce everyone in full. Mrs. Greene is staying in the house, but I want her announced, too, and be careful just to call her Mrs. Greene and to give the others their full names. You know Mrs. Hugh Greene, of course, but young Mr. Hugh and his wife must be announced as Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Beckett Greene."

"I quite understand madam. There will be Mrs. Greene, Mrs. Hugh Greene, Mrs. Edwin Greene, Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Greene and Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Beckett Greene."

"Yes, that's right. I'll order flowers for the table when I'm out this morning, and I want the Lowestoft service and the Wedgwood fruit plates, of course. It's a family dinner, but in a way it's a celebration."

She smiled at Rayner, confident of his interest in everything pertaining to the family.

"I'll see to everything myself, madam," he assured her.

"Mr. Greene has told you what champagne to bring up?" she asked.

"Yes, madam, but young Mrs. Hugh never takes champagne. Should I open a bottle of Chablis for her?"

"No, certainly not. She must take a little tonight."

"Thank you, madam. Cook desired me to ask you if you would care for the ice pudding to be shaped like a bell and garnished with orange blossom. She can make a nice sugar wreath to decorate the dish."

"What a good idea! Yes, tell cook that will be very nice, and that it is very good of her to have

thought out a little compliment for Miss Jessica. I think that's all, then, thank you."

An expression of satisfaction had chased away her frown. She was pleased that the servants at least should throw themselves so keenly into a family affair, even though the fact of their doing so sharpened her annoyance at her children's aloof unresponsiveness.

The telephone rang shrilly. Probably Dora, she thought, and took off the receiver reluctantly; but it was Helen's voice that said:

"Hullo, Mrs. Greene! Is that you? Margaret told me you'd rung up while I was working. I'm sorry she didn't interrupt me; she ought to have known I'd speak to you today."

Mrs. Rodney was mollified by the flattering implication in Helen's words, but she hoped for a further confirmation when she answered provocatively,

"Good morning, my dear. It was a little annoying, of course, but still you mustn't make an exception of me."

Helen's reply was casual but final.

"I couldn't ordinarily. But today is rather special, isn't it?"

Piqued as she was at not being given preferential treatment, Mrs. Rodney was so delighted with

Helen for realizing the importance of the occasion, that she decided to ignore the other point in the meantime. It could always be brought up later.

"I'm so glad you think so, dear," she said, warmly. "It certainly is a special occasion from my point of view. Tell me, what are you thinking of wearing?"

"My silver-and-white brocade. It's much the grandest frock I've got, so what could be more suitable?"

Mrs. Rodney wondered momentarily if there was a faint note of mockery in Helen's tones, but decided that it must be due to the telephone.

"That's delightful. You always look so nice in it. And, Helen dear, don't be late at all, will you? It worries grannie if dinner is a minute later than quarter to eight."

"No, we won't be late, I promise. I'll let Geoffrey drive the car."

"Do, Helen. I'm sure it's wiser."

"Was there anything else you wanted, Mrs. Greene?"

"No, nothing. I only thought I'd remind you about the hour."

"Well, good-by, Mrs. Greene, and good luck

with your stage-managing. I hope the production will be good."

"Helen! Hullo, Helen! Don't go yet. Tell me what you mean, dear?"

Again a faint doubt of Helen's good faith crossed Mrs. Rodney's mind, but she was reassured by Helen's calm explanation.

"I mean about tonight. You'll have to stage-manage the whole affair, and I'm sure it will go beautifully. I propose to enjoy myself enormously as one of the humbler members of the caste."

"Oh, I see!" Mrs. Rodney resolutely stilled her doubts and went on, playfully, "Of course a good hostess always has to stage-manage a little, and even more in a family party. Good-by, dear child, till this evening, and don't be late."

Going upstairs to put on her hat, Edith Greene's mind was busy over the choice of flowers for the table. White flowers seemed to her the most ceremonial, but she rejected chrysanthemums as being too clumsy and lilies-of-the valley as being reminiscent of the sick-room. I must strike the right note with my flowers, she thought. I want the whole thing to be sufficiently important. Lilies, of course—Madonna lilies; so suitable for both

old Mrs. Greene and Jessica. They would be exactly right.

Her face cleared and she went briskly out, confident that the scene was set for the evening's play.

II

It was only twenty-five to eight when Rayner opened the door to Lavinia.

"You are early, madam," he said as he took her cloak. "I don't think anyone is down yet."

"I know I am. I wondered if there was a chance of seeing grannie before the others arrived. Do you suppose she will be down soon?"

"I don't know at all, but I can send Mary up to tell her you are here."

"Yes, do, Rayner. Go and tell her now. I'll go up to the drawing-room."

On the upper landing Lavinia stopped to look at her reflection, tiny and faintly distorted, in a small convex mirror that had delighted her as a child.

She was wearing for the first time, in deference to her mother's wishes, a yellow velvet frock, quite plain, very full skirted, and, in the fashion

of the moment, short in front but dipping almost to the ground behind.

Suddenly she took her wide skirt in either hand and curtsied very low to her own image. The mirror was flooded with the yellow of her frock, but as she rose and straightened herself the small grotesque reflection was reëstablished.

The drawing-room was in darkness except for the leaping firelight, but she switched on the small lamp beside the fire and sat down, thinking dreamily how pretty it would be if a group of ladies in long old-fashioned frocks were to assemble there that night.

We would have to kiss grannie's hand, and mother's, too, I suppose, and Helen and Jessica and I would curtsy very low to one another and say "Sister" and "Your servant, sister." And there would be so much swaying and rustling of silks that it would seem like sixty Mrs. Greenes instead of six.

She sighed as she looked forward to the evening ahead.

Really, it will be quite ordinary, she decided: a little flutter of excitement as each one comes in, and then perfectly ordinary conversation. Aunt Sarah rather prim, and grannie very crisp, and

Aunt Dora pretty doleful, and mother managing everything and keeping us all in our proper places.

She stood up and, leaning against the mantelpiece, looked around the shadowy room. Everything was orderly: the soft puce curtains hung in beautifully symmetrical folds; a bowl of giant chrysanthemums stood on a table, each petal tightly curled; the firelight shone on a vivid Chinese vase standing on a little lacquer cabinet between the windows.

An air of stillness and expectation hung over the room.

It's a lovely setting, Lavinia decided, suddenly; after all, there may be an atmosphere about this evening. Grannie is very old and Jessica is very young, and nearly all the happiness and unhappiness that lies in the years between them is bound up with the Greene family. Perhaps that will make grannie younger and Jessica older, so that they will become alike and indistinguishable.

She shivered a little. I'm glad I'm out of it, she thought; this family feeling frightens me. I should hate to feel myself becoming akin to Aunt Dora.

Rayner came into the room, switching on the lights, so that all the details of color and form suddenly sprang into being.

"Mrs. Greene will be down in a moment," he said.

"Thank you," said Lavinia, absently. "Rayner, it's going to be very odd tonight."

"I hope not, madam, I'm sure."

"Yes, it's bound to be odd; I shall feel like the only human in a company of poor ghosts."

THE END

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